





# ROBERT IRWIN

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART • NEW YORK

**Robert Irwin**  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
April 16–May 29, 1977

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WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART



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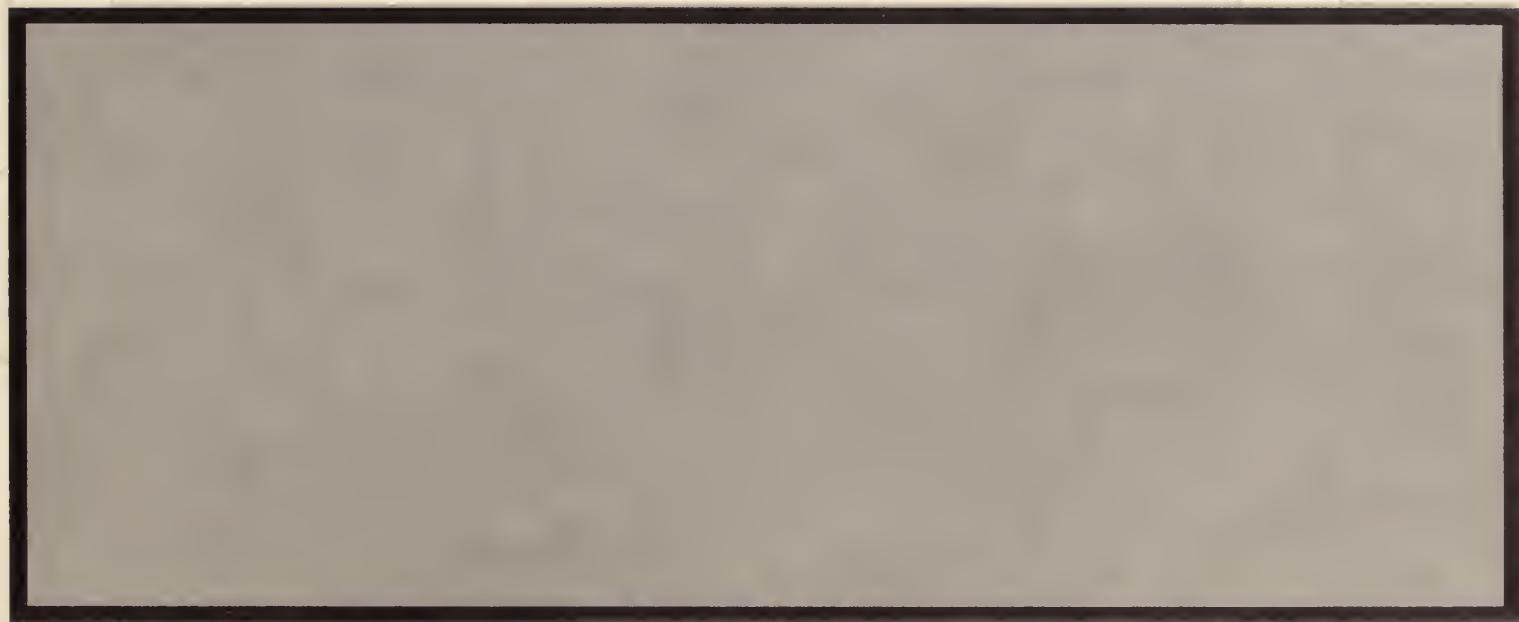


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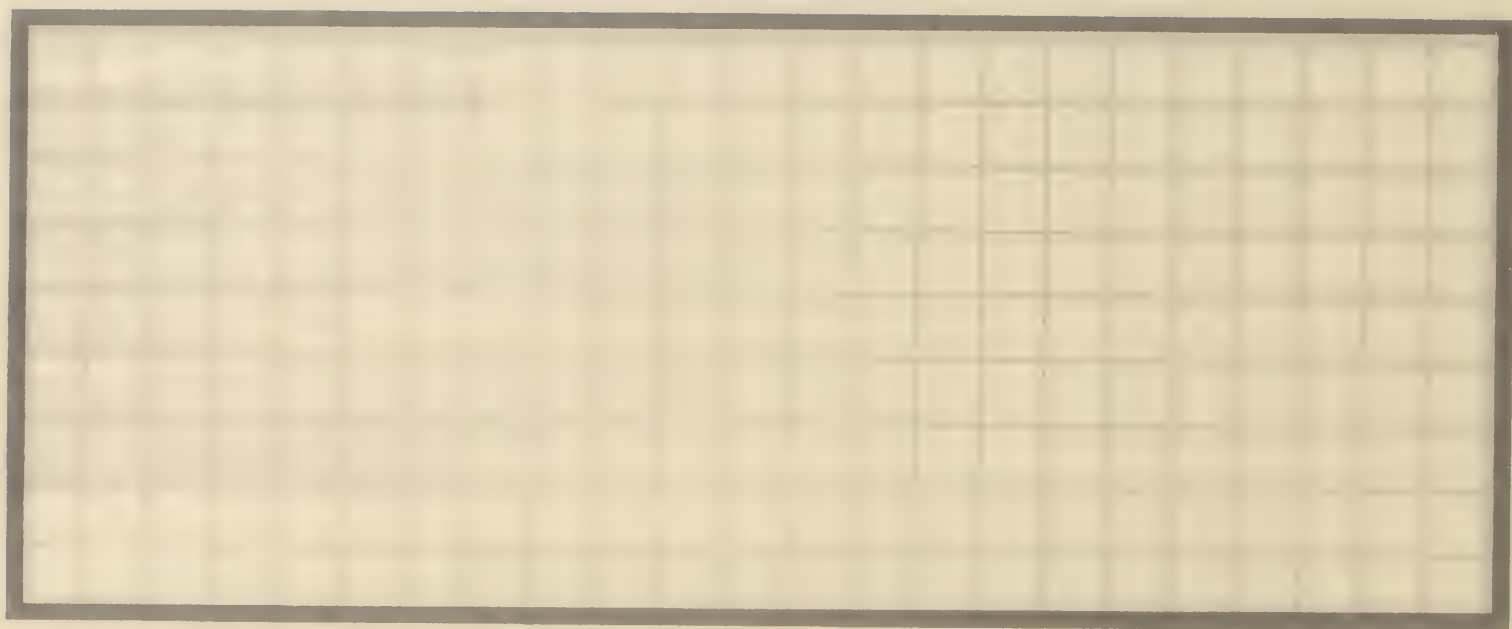
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WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART



PLAN VIEW - FRONT  
FLOOR PLANE  
BLACK RECTANGLE



BLACK RECTANGLE



**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**



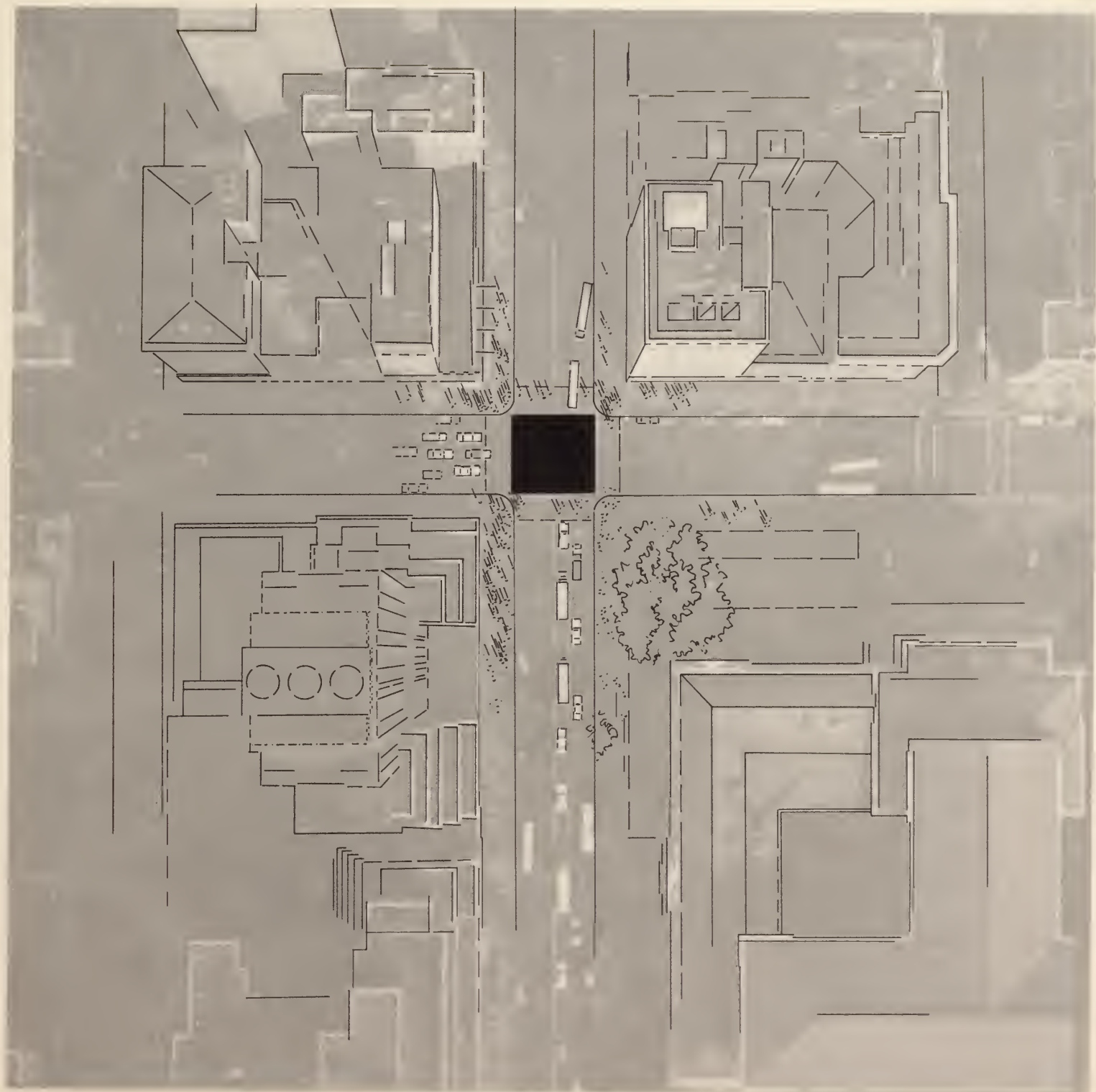
PLAN VIEW fourth floor

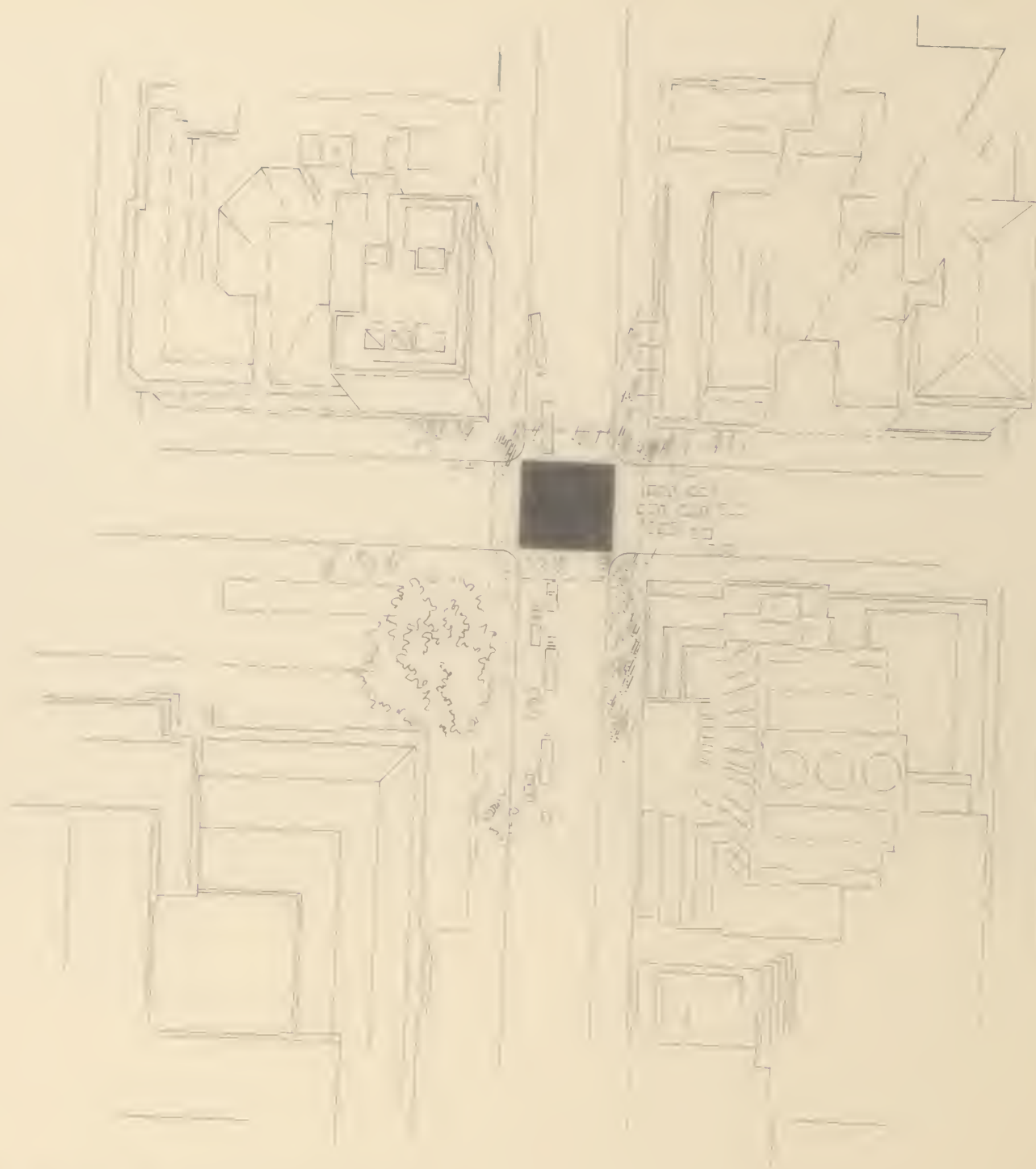
**FLOOR PLANE**



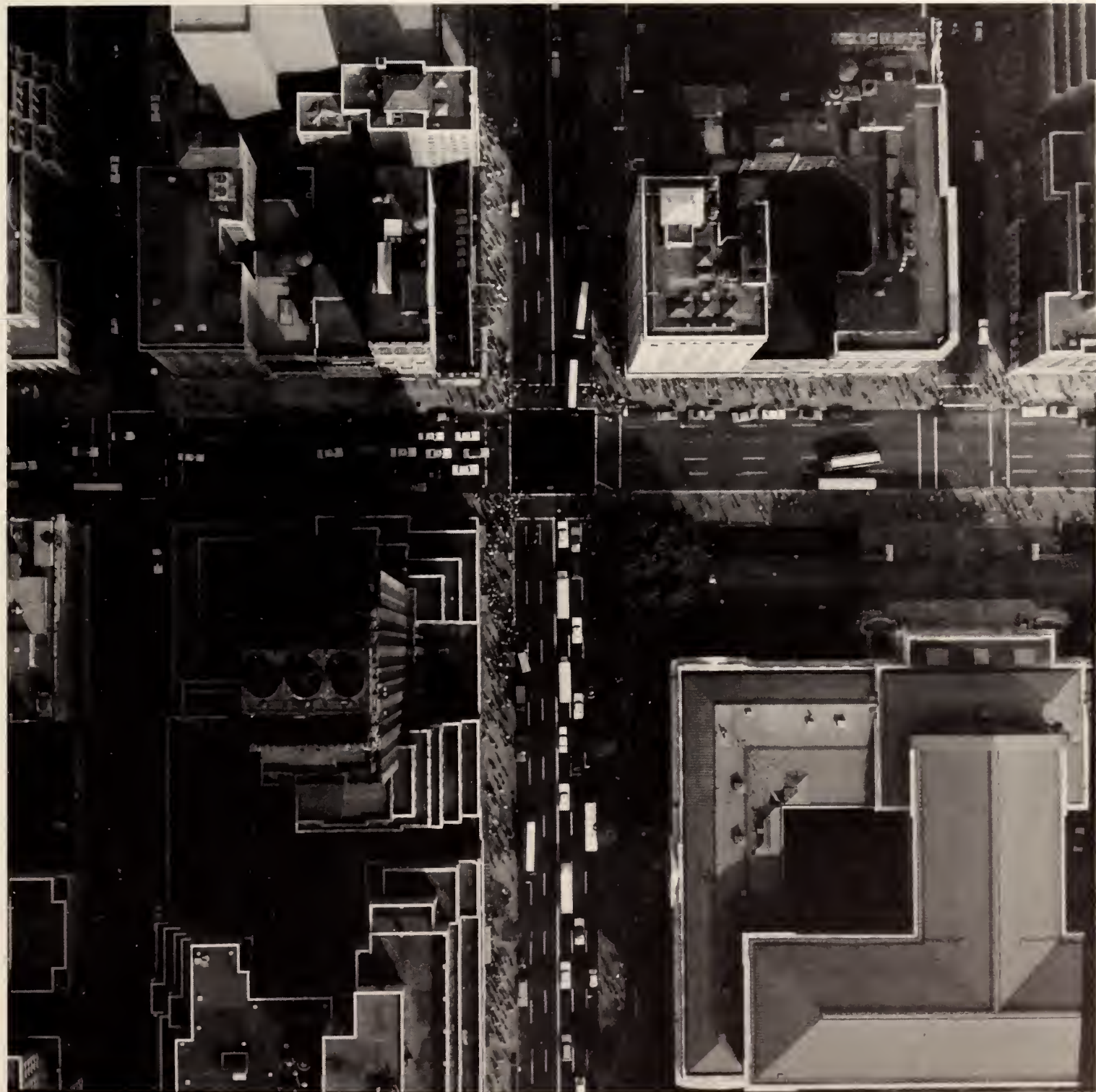
Opposite: Black plane, Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York.

Pages 12-13: Black planes—Shadows, Park Avenue, New York.





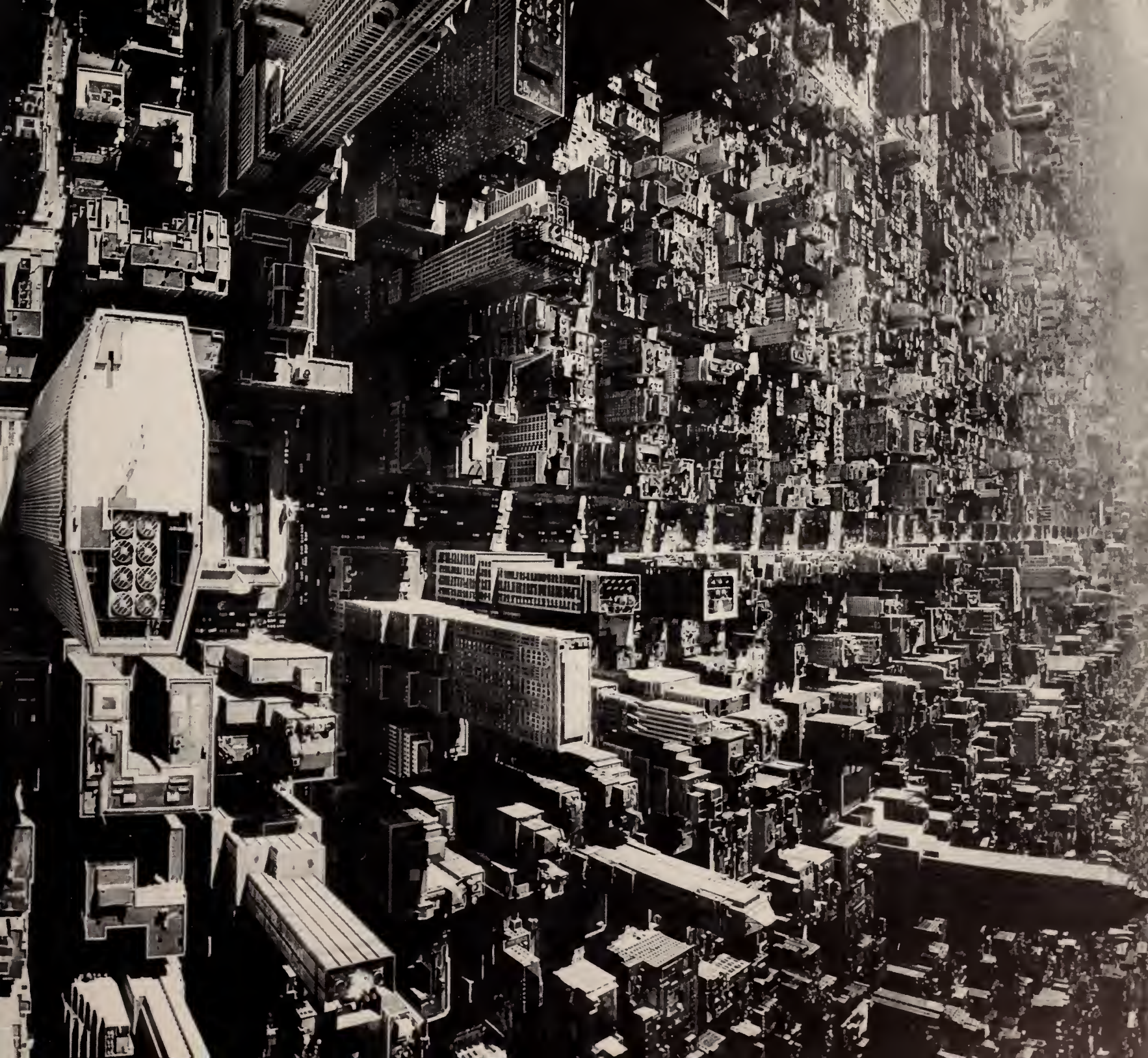








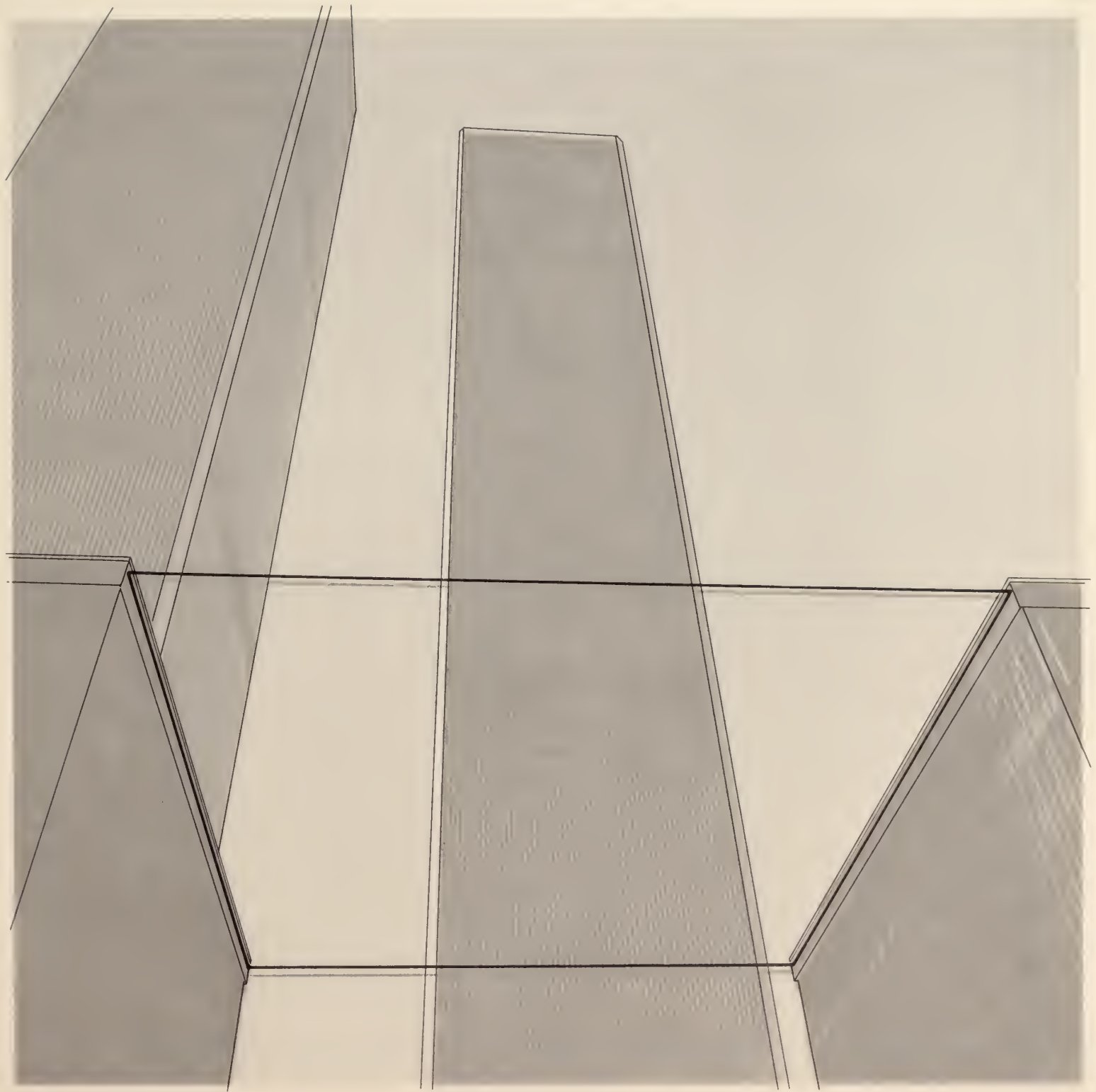


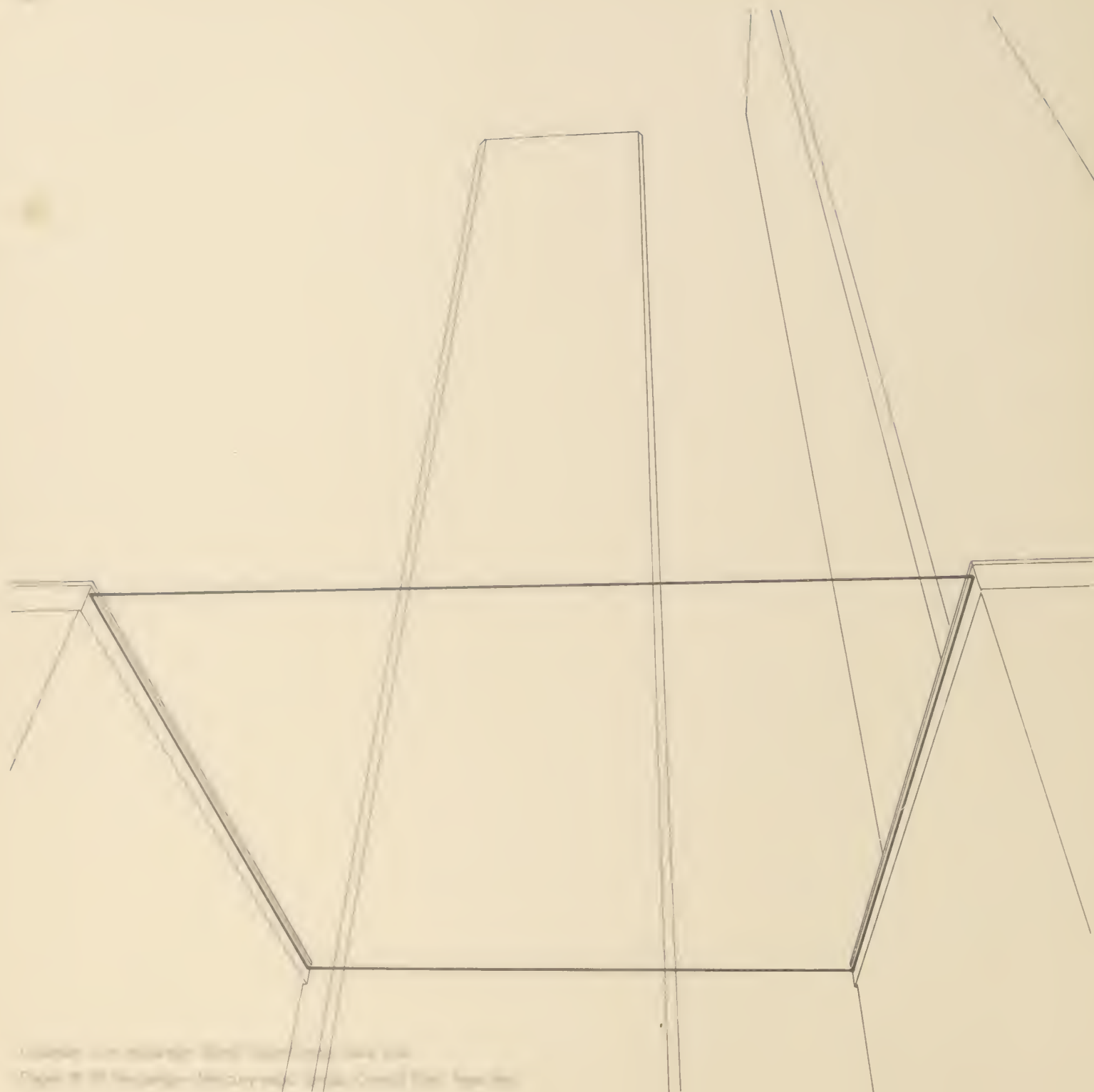


Opposite: Line rectangle, World Trade Center, New York.

Pages 18-19: Rectangle—Mercury-vapor lamps, Central Park, New York.







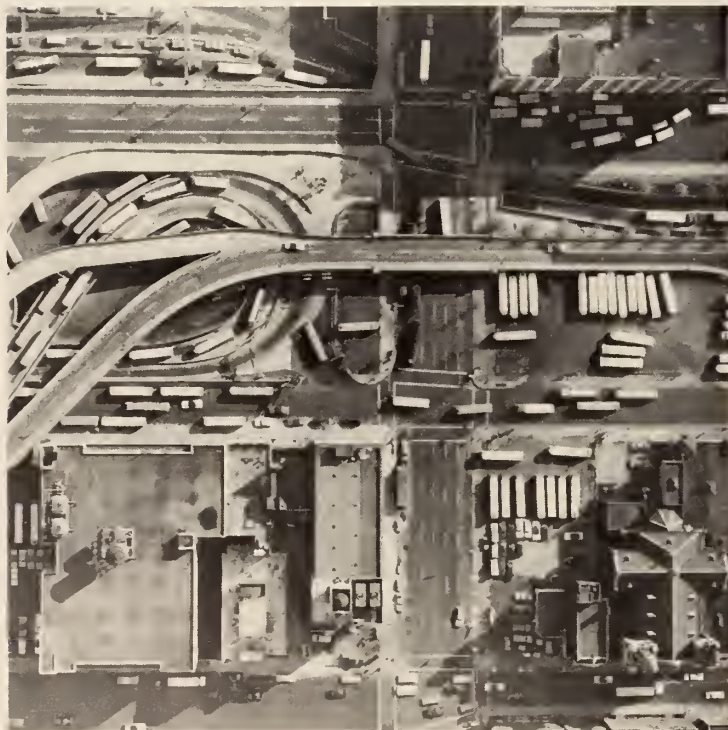
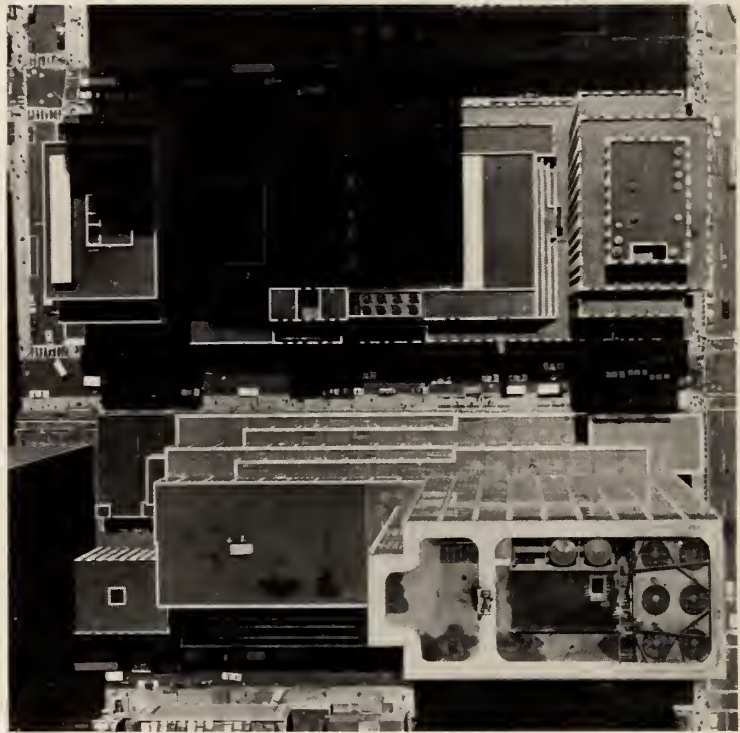
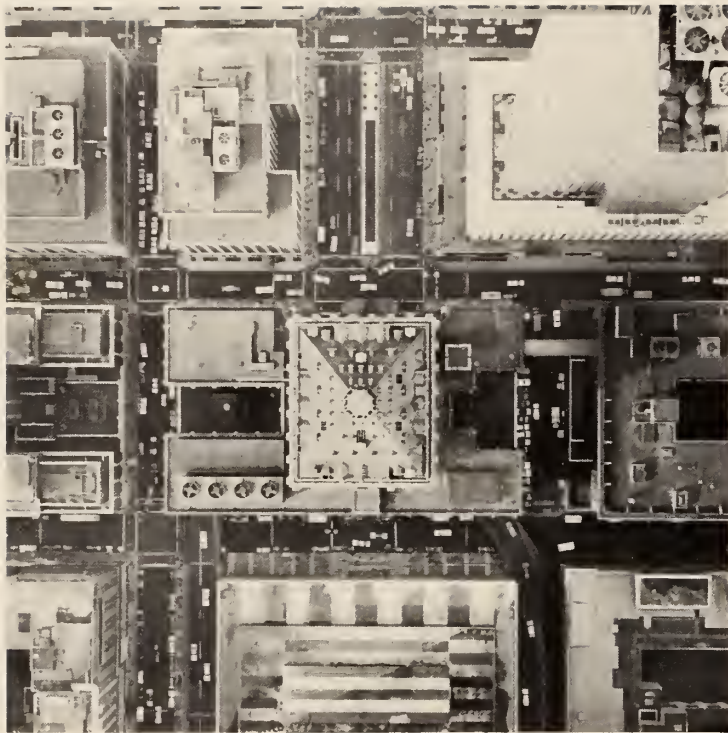




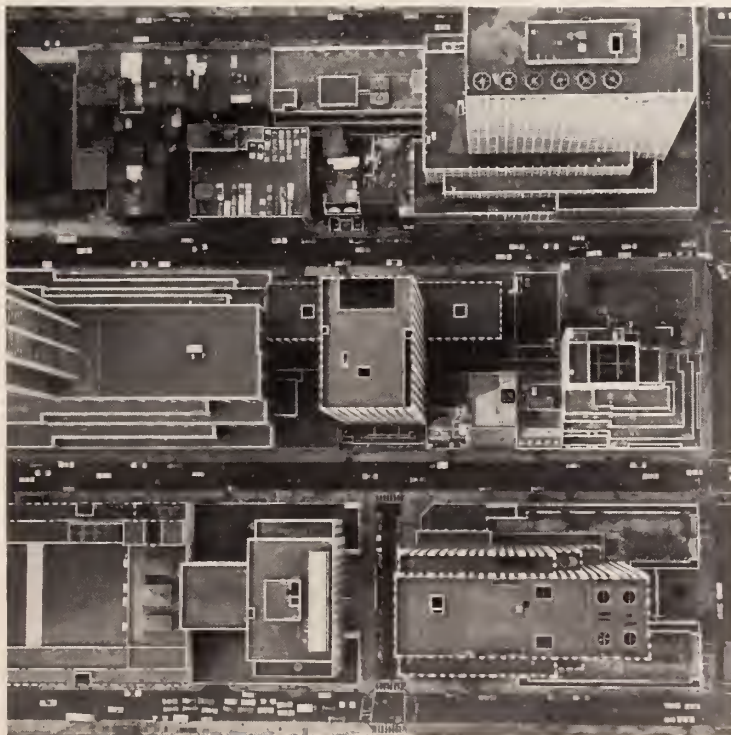
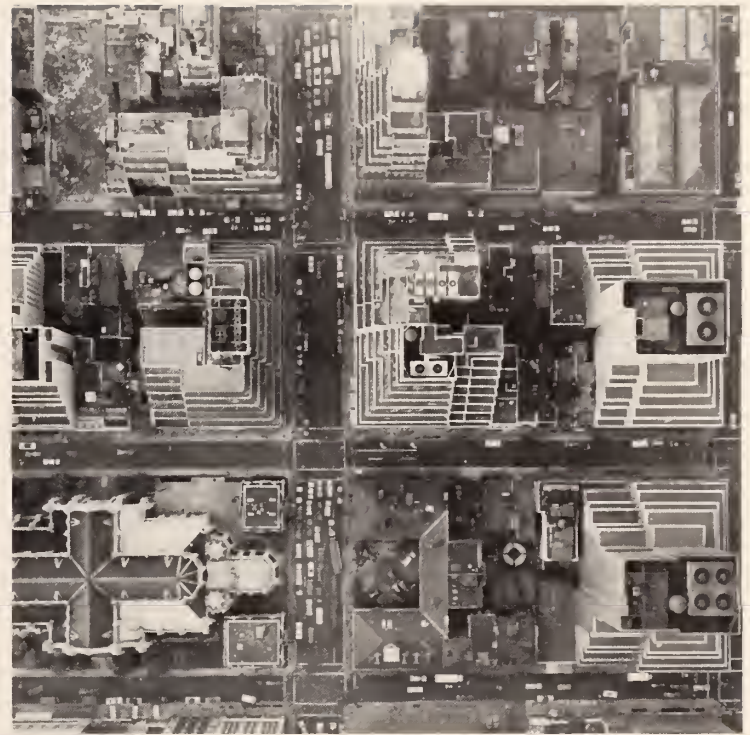
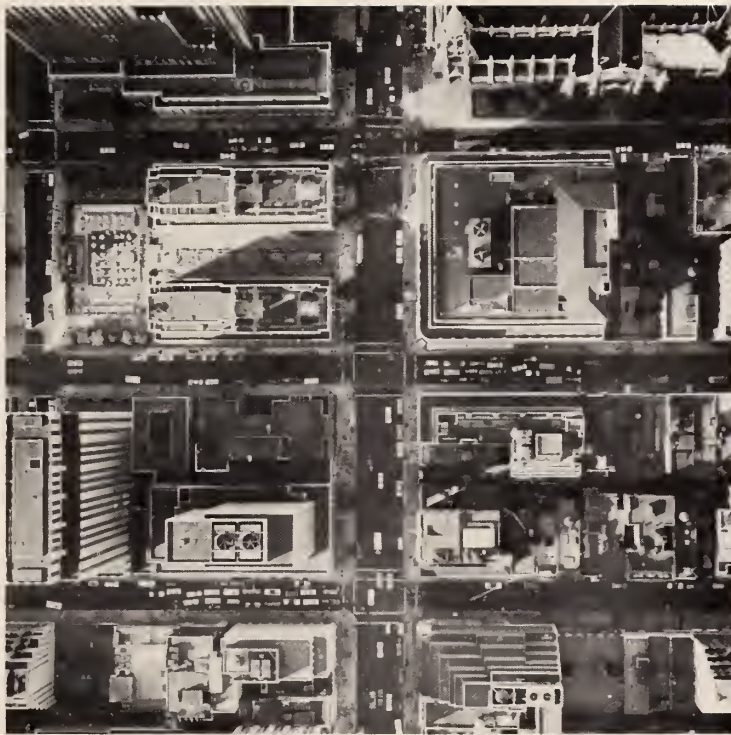




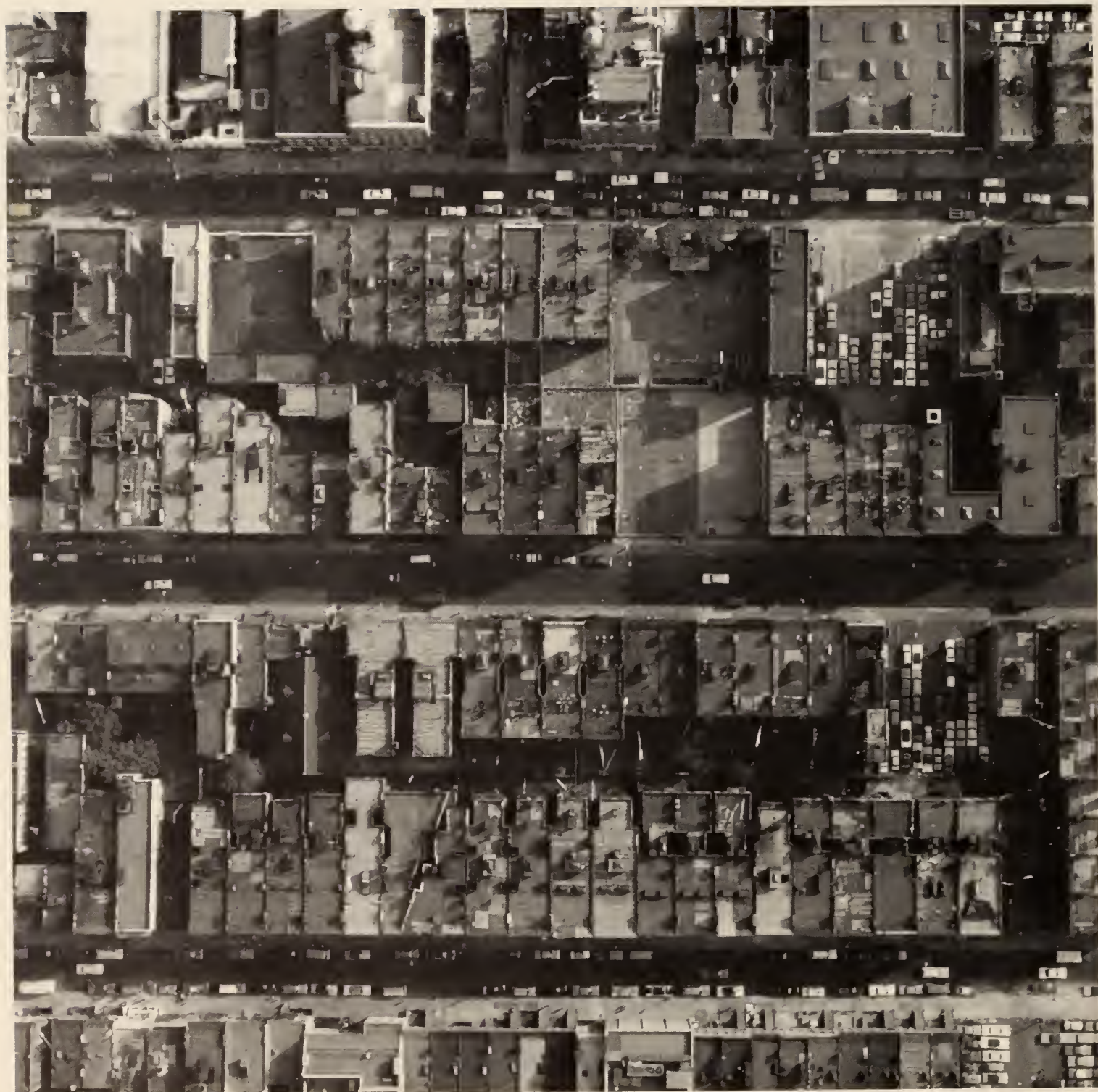












City grid, New York



I began as a painter in the middle of nowhere (L.A.) with few questions, and it wasn't until almost 1958, with the help of a few artist-friends (Craig Kauffman, Ed Moses, Bill Bengston), that I even became aware of the work of the Abstract Expressionists. When I did, I cut my teeth as an artist on my interest in their work. I thought they were great artists, and I still do.

My first real question concerned the arbitrariness of my paintings, the fact that six months after the "emotion" of my involvement much of what I had done just seemed unnecessary. That led me of course to my own superficiality and the necessity to begin considering how I might discipline my approach as well as extend my sensibilities. From about 1960 to 1970, in an almost reclusive and "deadly serious" activity, I used my painting as a step-by-step process, each new series of works acting in direct response to those questions raised by the previous series. I first questioned the mark (the image) as meaning and then even as focus; I then questioned the frame as containment, the edge as the beginning and end of what I see. In this way I slowly dismantled the act of painting to consider the possibility that no-thing ever really transcends its immediate environment.

The last question forced me to give up my practice as a painter, not as an answer but simply as a way to continue following the character of my questions. It seemed that if I were to continue getting up each morning to drive down the same street and spend my time in the same studio environments with the same dimensions and means, I would only continue to do what it was I was beginning to do well, paint. The alternatives seemed very unclear. I don't know if I would have volunteered had I simply been asked or told, but I had become hooked on my own curiosity.

In 1970 I began again by simply getting rid of my studio and all its accompanying accouterments and saying that I would go anywhere, anytime, *in response*. This at first in effect left me in the middle of nowhere, that space created by having "nothing to do," a delicious state of attention where your perception is allowed to wander and indulge without the demands to function. During this period I tried to respond directly to the quality of each situation I was in, not to change it wholesale into a new or ideal environment, but to attend directly to the nature of how it already was. How is it that a space could ever come to be considered empty when it is filled with real and tactile events?

From about 1972 to the present I used the opportunity of my availability to carry on a running dialogue with myself, a series of inquiries with other disciplines, and I undertook a purely private exploration and indication of some places I liked the feel of. In an Art and Technology project I met Dr. Edward Wortz, whose shared curiosity helped change my life. Much of the following essay comes from that running dialogue, just as much of my thinking comes from my activity as a horse player, where I learned from experience that every kind of information, from hard fact to pure intuition, is totally corruptible, and that you can make it do or prove most anything you

really want it to. In this sense you should not take the following too seriously. I worry that what has been a speculative process while carried out in dialogue, in writing has become almost rigid.

I have always harbored the romantic notions that the art world existed as a realm for dialogue in which each of us presents those ideas and feelings gained in private and further entertains those possibilities presented to us by others. I like the work of Lucas Samaras, for example, because he takes me down dark alleys I would never think to go; and while I may seem to argue against much of the ground on which "conceptualists" tread, I am fascinated by what the best of them think; I am intrigued with the poetry of Vito Acconci or the activities of Mel Bochner which I don't presume to fully understand but whose vitality I can feel, although I could not approach it on my own.

This exhibition has moved far enough away from being a retrospective and into becoming a project about my present interests that I have become excited with the opportunity to illustrate and play with where it is that my curiosity has wanted me to go since 1975.

It seems that the word "art" has come to be thought of as something given, as a fixed concept. This "art" is not thought of as simply a name, a name designating the pure subject—the empty void of concept—but has instead become immediately connected to those now historically connotated acts, methods, and places of "art" whose further proofs and reasons now reside in the various historical forms and methods of knowledge.

This abstraction has been carried to take those facts/forms of "art" performance and further compound them into a useful cultural system of practice and judgment, in turn implicating the whole of art as a similarly formful process. On the grounds of this self-induced formfulness/usefulness, the word has further come to designate a pure abstraction of quality, and in turn a formal logic of art. One could now suppose that one is either in possession of or can be "educated" to established truths.

Such a formal logic acts as if the explication of the absolute principle would now be dispensable; intuition is just dismissed out of hand, glibly characterized as immediate and then dismissed for its immediacy. Hence the real subject of art is obstructed by a conceit that simply deigns not to argue. In some cases, a well-established formalism will even assume to predict or designate the course of (what can be thought of as) art. In extreme cases, the *cause* for art will even be established external to the subject art and drawn retroactively on established social need, i.e., China's cultural goal-setting for art. The demands for such a usefulness and the ready satisfaction of those demands are easily mistaken for a concern with what is "humanly essential"; "essential" is tied here causally to *function* and in turn binds art, aesthetics, consciousness, etc., to requirements of social meaningfulness.

And within a certain limited sphere, this version of the provenance of art operates quite adequately. But when this contraction of

art to its social function is now further misread as the total concern of art, we must count it among those devices for bypassing the real subject of art. On the contrary, the root subject of art in fact lies in aesthetic inquiry and, as such, is not exhausted by any aim, nor wholly subsumable to any cause. Any concept of the whole art which precludes the whole, taken by itself, is false and lifeless. Any given art fact exists only in so far as it has been worked out in detail from the subject, and in those specific facts of our art performances lie both the grounds for a developing system of judgment and a direct seeding back into the roots of art as an extended inquiry of the human potential for the subject, i.e., what it is that has not yet been considered in depth. Any given art fact exhibited in performance should be thought of as *conditional*, which simply means it should never be held wholly apart from, or independent of, those grounds from which it was drawn. In art, any "truths" are inseparable facts of the process, art. The living substance is that which is in truth subject or actual only in so far as it is in the *movement* of positing itself.

It is a critical fallacy to imagine that "art" could be satisfied with the in-itself as knowledge, while sparing itself the concerns and questions of its roots in the world. In *thought* we must come to the seriousness of the concept which comes from the *experience* of the subject itself. Where an essence like aesthetics is the subject, the truth rests only in a consideration of the whole process: the whole is the essence continually perfecting itself through development.

It is the cultural myth of art that we somehow just automatically come to deal with this whole complexity. Whereas the fact is that each of us is painstakingly educated to this cultural game of art as *practicioners*. (We shall define a "game" as any activity with a made-up set of rules for determining winners and losers; "game" is herein counterpoised to "play," free-form activity pursued for its own sake without concern for winning or losing. A good part of the difficulty with the art world today is, of course, that it has made a game out of an activity which is necessarily free play.)

As social beings, we organize and structure ourselves and our environment into an "objective" order; we organize our perceptions of things into various pre-established abstract structures. Our minds direct our senses every bit as much as our senses inform our minds. Our reality in time is confined to our ideas about reality.

Now, if we are to question this "reality"—question, that is, reality in both its popular version and its true nature—it is first necessary to understand that we do not begin at the beginning, or in an empirical no-where. Instead we always begin somewhere *in the middle of everything*.

Now, if one day you should be visited by a doubt or a simple curiosity that everything there is to know, is known, or is imminently available...being already committed to those values held at the center of the milieu, it may strike you that this is the least likely place to ask real questions for the justifications of those views. All the more reason that we should begin by examining, one at a time, the character of each of those commitments, values, methods, and places

we have been given to hold so dear.

Of course to all those still committed and entertaining no doubts, our activity could only appear an antisocial or irrational squandering of value, and when their questions—"What does it mean? What are your alternatives or answers?"—seem to go effectively unanswered (since, of course, this process of "withdrawal" is not in and of itself an objective alternative), they are naturally confirmed in their initial suspicions.

But if we suspend their objections for the moment and allow this process of intimate questioning to bring us, in time, to the periphery of what is now held to be true, we will have gained a unique—and precarious—*posture of inquiry*, a perceptual/conceptual equilibrium from which we can now begin asking that question: "Why this art?" Such is in fact the critical challenge of "modern art" as a real cultural "antithesis."

That we have all been deeply affected by this, our recent history—pro or con—is more true than obvious. Much of art's reasoning still remains generally obscure since the tendency is of course to remain wrapped up in the immediacies of our personal content, the warmth of our crafts, or in our ambitions as cultural game-players. We fail to recognize that "modern art" really advocates not simply a change in style but a change in the character of those most basic conceptual structures that serve to contain and order our lives. For example: It is inconceivable to those humanists who believe in and practice the logic of "figurative art" that the hidden structure of abstraction involved in pictorial thought—the demand, for instance, that imagery be held to the logical framework of perspective—offers a perfect example of that bias which has most dehumanized this culture. (Indeed, perspective is infinitely more abstract than so-called "abstract art.")

Just how is it that our useful conceptual structures become those same hidden orthodoxies? The answer lies, in part, in the nature of their development as form, an evolution which has transpired in such discrete stages and over such extended periods of time that most often we come to their existence as form generations removed from their source. Since they are given to us whole, as independent sets of facts, even truths, it is no wonder that we fail at times to recognize them for what they really are: terrestrially conceived, culturally compounded abstractions.

Form—formful—formal—formalized.

Words like art, culture, logic, reason, abstraction, formalism, structuralism, behaviorism, aesthetics, perception, and consciousness are persuasive words in everyday usage, and often taken for granted, but they have undergone difficult and varied histories. The questions rooted in these words are not only about meaning; they are about meanings. With words such as these, involving *ideas* and *values*, the varied usages and compounds of the words themselves are elements of the problem. While these words have long histories of general significance, they now often encom-



pass radical variations in meaning; and some of these meanings are particularly elusive. For example: There is no longer a word in the English language for our being as a whole complexity, a continuum, or even a word that simply indicates the range of possibilities within which to pose the whole question of consciousness. (The word "consciousness," which at least began ambiguously, has long since been subsumed by a logical construct to be the special property of the cognitive thinking mind. Hence the hidden meaning of the word "consciousness" is an objective value structure, implying a hierarchy of meanings and values: consciousness, semiconsciousness, unconsciousness, subconsciousness, and the number of exotic and suspect extensions downward, such as ESP, sixth sense, and so forth.) In this special sense, all the words seemingly useful for a discussion of art, culture, and aesthetics have been complicated, even convoluted, in their special usages. Some have been specialized to the contradictory demands of more than one discipline; most eventually get caught up into serving the insular purposes of various movements, schools of thought, mysticisms or social ideologies, their meanings recast to service various specific ambitions. Necessarily forced to employ terms as complex and variable as these, it is not as easy as it is often made to seem for us to have a dialogue about the possibilities of something as ephemeral as the subject of art. So I would like to begin by attempting a simple model of what I consider to be the crux of the problem, the process of a compounding abstraction, the process by which our perceptions/conceptions are carried over to mean something wholly independent of their origins.

To attempt such a model is both complex and speculative, and the following articulation should be read as a procedure or set of procedures, rather than as an explanatory system. To begin with, the articulation should not be thought of as having a proper beginning or end. Also it is a fine but critical point in the discussion of any such process whether the emphasis is put a) on the inner-relationships within individuals, the inter-relationships between individuals, and the inter-relationships between individuals and things, or b) on the relationships as systems or structures in their own right.

Furthermore, there is probably no such thing as a pure naive perception of the world. As noted earlier, we do not begin at the beginning in such matters but already somewhere in the middle. For example: Conceive in your mind the idea of a straight line (which has only a limited actuality in nature). In extended time consider our "straight line" as the basis for the compounded abstraction known as Euclidean geometry. Again in extended time, consider a world developed and structured in line with our concept—i.e., grid to city; frame and plane to painting—point-to-point as a way of procedure through life. Now, place yourself in the middle of this milieu as the actual (physical) frame of your experiential reference, your reality, and ask yourself, "What can I know?"

So let us entertain an experiment. For the sake of discussion and clarity, I will begin with a mythical, simple, subjective being and

proceed linearly to develop or compound each of the parts in its place and relation, and the sequence of relations to each succeeding form. Keep in mind that the process is never in actuality moving in only the one direction; indeed it often moves radially and almost always transpires reciprocally. If it helps, give yourself the mental picture of a Möbius strip and commit the following to the dynamics of its continuous loop, at least to the point of understanding that where I end, there is also a beginning.

## The Process of Compounded Abstraction— Notes Toward a Model

### 1. Perception/Sense

We shall define *perception* as the originary faculty of the unique individual, our direct interface with the phenomenally given, that seemingly infinitely textured field of our presence in the world. Our senses continuously present us with an extremely complex *tactile* synesthesia of data (it is as if all of our senses were collectively running their hands over the world). Perception, ideally, offers a pure *re-presentation* of the essential natures of that field.

Our perception gains, through the senses, the inner-relationships or inter-relationships by which the order or character of occurrences (recognizable dispositions of pattern and movement, etc.) will distinguish itself with or from its surroundings in tactile form. This tactile *form* is acted upon—enhanced—by those intrinsic capabilities/properties inherent in the process of perception itself.

We should note that perception as indicated here is an actual process or state of being, having identifiable form—hence a form of knowing. (That is to say, we know the sky's blueness even before we know it as "blue," let alone as "sky.")

### 2. Conception/Mind

We shall characterize *conception* as the almost simultaneous faculty of the unique individual to appropriate and mold reality as presented in *perception* into a systematic experience of cognition; we are speaking of a process of selection, enhancement, and re-presentation from the tactile form of perception to the forms of mental imagery (words, pictures, symbols, perspectival frameworks, etc.), those representation events which code input to the brain, plus those processing events which again comprise the character of the intrinsic organization itself.

Mental organization at this level is essentially a development

through the immediate processes of comparative reasoning, often later characterized as intuitive thinking. We are presented here with the first aspect of what is often referred to as the "eternal paradox," the mind/body problem. This development of the identity who conceives from the being which perceives is the second abstraction of form (i.e., the cognitive "I" weighted with and against the phenomenal self). This abstraction determines how the world of mental constructs can legitimately be obtained from the world of phenomena, developing and establishing rules of correspondence for the transition from perception to conception.

It should be remarked that identity is certainly a logical determination, yet it won't do to conceive something existing and self-identical as for that reason thought through. Were we to do so, we would leave out of consideration the moment of individual singularity and organic wholeness. This misconception is gained in that to the cognitive mind what is given in sensation becomes the seemingly immediate object of thought, giving to the cognitive "I" the illusion that phenomenal experience has no time span of its own and hence no life. While this phenomenal "self" may seem unsubstantial, without objectlike characteristics, as I sit here its presence is very clear to me. (The fact that I think is clear; the fact that I am being fed infinite information is likewise clear, even if much of it is being held in abeyance, even, that is, if I do not choose to cognate on it. Were this tree to begin collapsing on me, I would realize that I had been aware of its presence all along.)

### 3. Form/Physical Compound



The next movement of our compounding abstraction gives to our mental forms an equivalent re-presentation in physical form, i.e., symbol, act, or thing. To objectify and place into action what already exists (is known subjectively) is a particularly obvious and observable example of a compounding abstraction.

We are detailing the initial re-presentation from subjective being (private access) to objective being (public access). In this movement we are carried to the second aspect of the "eternal paradox," the individual's private being vis-à-vis his social being. For any individual at any moment, subjective and objective reality now operates simultaneously with regard to needs, methods, and criteria.

Note the specific and repeated use of the word "re-presentation," a word whose familiar usage (representation) now tends to mask what is actually taking place. It is critically important to recognize that in each step of the process a complete transformation, *in all dimensions*, has been accomplished, that the new form is never the same as that which previously existed whole. While active condensation can be considered a gain using external criteria (for ex-

ample, expediency), this change in dimensions is not accomplished without loss (a loss, specifically, of information). Here Worts's law applies, as a complement to the gestalt conception of the world: "Each new whole is *less* than the sum of its parts."

In public access, form now takes on the added responsibilities and accouterments of communication. To share, impart, and partake is to put oneself in relation to others, to make known in common.

Commune = communicate = community.

Where the added criteria of community exists, it necessarily implies an added process of development to hold common or generally agreed upon ideas concerning the properties of form. To gain a prescribed communication, objective rules of correspondence must be defined. But, again, in defining these rules, we must understand that we are surrendering part of the unique, idiosyncratic experience of the individual.

For example: A language form is accomplished first by a sensible/accessible abstraction of sign to thing. There can be no distinction without intention—we are distinguishing objects with a purpose in mind—and there can be no intention unless contents are seen to differ in value. If a content is of value, a sign/name can be taken to indicate this value, and now the signification of the sign can be identified with the value of the content. When the sign repeated becomes the value of the sign—so that the word "pain" means pain without the presence of pain—then the ground rules of correspondence for an independent abstract form (sans experience) have been accomplished. While words are continually modified by experience, their ultimate usefulness lies in their ability to transcend the infinite complexities of individual experience (in this regard, mathematics is the best and art the worst) and remain reasonably constant and common. There is, for example, the authority we grant the dictionary ("Well, my Oxford says..."). Systematic signification is immediately a highly productive process, and it is perhaps only natural that well disciplined communication forms—linguistics, mathematics, even art—will develop into complex and layered systems which gain in extended time the properties of autonomous systems of value and meaning. (In art, for example, the object, rather than perception, comes to stand at the center of the art experience.)

But here, at this early point of their inception, it should be made clear that at one level of their being all subsequent systems will extend out from (and must return to) the objects and relationships about which they initially spoke. This can be thought of as the root subject.

It can be considered that context and knowledge are virtually synonymous. Even in simple perception this contextual binding is the critical factor in knowing. It is indeed the fact of the contextual nature of experience which will allow for the further compounding of the abstraction. This compounding is now achieved through the observable evidence of similarities vs. differences, patterns of oc-

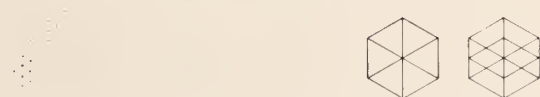


currence and place, etc. Overlaps considered to have sufficient affinities are quickly considered to form sets.

Behavioral form, language form, artistic form, etc.

The actual complexities of our being in form are now literally squared. For example, it will no longer be considered enough just to give form to art, which in itself must be considered extraordinary, a communication in its own right, to which the added abstraction of terms in explanation would seem redundant. But the fact is our "art forms" do not enter the cultural fabric pure and whole without the further processing (at a later stage of the compounding abstraction) of social and historical argumentation. That "art will out" is a myth: our artist must now weigh the character of both his individual and social roles to determine the nature of his acts.

#### 4. Formful/Objective Compound



The further movement of form lies essentially in the observable evidence of its consistencies in performance and usefulness. This measure of uniform usefulness and accessibility must be considered for what it implies, both in terms of a social scheme and in terms of human relations. (History, for example, now moves from the oral story into the form of organized knowledge. By gaining the more formful—more abstract—written account, history now separates itself in method from its counterpart in the individual—memory. And this will prove to be a critical distinction.)

A consistently useful performance combined with the reliability of some observable measure is sufficient grounds for the development of contextual norms, i.e., an expectation of what is usual. When sufficiently formful norms exist, a development of standards can be attempted. Standards constitute or afford a means for comparison and, in turn, judgment. A contextual system of objective comparison with and against what is usual (the norm) is the single greatest accomplishment for a community mentality. The individual in the community now gains an added efficiency: he is relieved of the necessity of continually having to check and reason his actions against his individual perception/conception, each time as if from scratch.

Behavioral norms, language norms, artistic norms, etc.

Beginning with what may be considered concrete (weights and measures, etc.), the development of standards will institute the grounds (i.e., usefulness) for a reliable objective authority. This idea of standards as the authoritative measure of correctness will quite naturally be extended to matters in which less precise measurement is possible—human behavior, habitability, art, etc.—but for which, on

demand, a consensual/positional agreement can be articulated, capable of grading levels of competence and compliance. (The vagueness here often makes it difficult to disagree: The questioning of a single aspect of moral standards, for instance, is easily, often intentionally, misread as an attack on morals as a whole.)

It should be noted that repetition, consistency, and usefulness are the grounds for a compounding historical form. The idiosyncratic is generally ignored in favor of the articulation of the kinds of continuous and connecting processes which allow for systematization and interpretation.

If the measures of a contextual standard/norm can be sufficiently disciplined so that its tenets can become reasonably uncontested, a process of formal practice can be instituted. A thoroughly disciplined contextual knowledge, having achieved the authoritative status of standards, now allows for the compounding of principles, rules of procedure and maxims, based on the quantifiable evidence of intrinsic merit. To objectify fully is to give to our forms the characteristics of a formal reality.

#### 5. Formal/Boundaries and Axioms



The formal belongs to or comprises the essential constitution of something (as distinct from the matter composing it). The relationship of form and content, which until now could be thought of as a "chicken and egg" problem, might now seem resolved in favor of form. To objectify and to hold a distinction of boundaries are virtually one and the same; meanwhile, a certain balance is maintained in that formal reality simultaneously derives itself from the inside out through adherence to a set of axioms (a priori propositions). In a certain sense this equilibrium recapitulates the way in which the world presents itself in phenomenal experience, simultaneously as being (self) and presence (world).

The contextually bound-up bodies of knowledge and practice of which we spoke earlier will now be rigorously developed into distinct areas of expertise, capable of imploding from their boundaries or expanding from their axioms, along lines of proper procedure, to an ever increasing and overlapping accuracy of fact and an extended knowledge of disciplinary matters. For example, formal disciplines will now arise for the study of behavior (psychology), language (linguistics), and art ("fine" or "high" arts). Even more complex, interestingly, historical standards as points of reference in the *past* can become not only active ideas in the *present* (i.e., the measure for the standards of living) but will be used as a projection on the *future* (i.e., for what is thought to be desirable).

Formal is used here in the positive sense. In gaining a quite separate level, the compounding abstraction will now accomplish its

most productive feat. These disciplines will now gain in common (by degrees) the grounds and criteria for instituting an objective determination of validity in thought: *Logic*, the science of correct inference.

We have now arrived at the crux of our model, the perfect compound of the “eternal paradox.” In the simultaneous validity of two vantage points, and in logic and reason, we encounter the working paradox of our formative lives. Their clear distinctions as the methods of two distinct vantage points has become somewhat blurred through a history of continuous redefinitions. It is now often considered that their contradictions result from a difference in methodology and as such should be resolvable to one grand schema. If, for the moment, we set aside the numerous religious and mystical solutions which simply transcend the reality of the questions at hand, the two most prodigious and wonderful examples of this natural (and useful) inclination to reconcile the problem, each by attempting to subsume the properties of one to the other, have been Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (reason to logic) and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Mind* (logic to reason).

But it can be argued that logic and reason play out a balance, that each contributes what the other concedes, and that as such they were never intended to be resolved in the final sense of that word; that each moves out from a separate and unique vantage point, and as such develops a unique perspective on and in the world.

*I can reason but I cannot logic.* The difference is implicit in our usage. (I reason, but I do not logic: I use logic.)

Reason/individual/intuition/feeling: Reason is the processing of our interface with our own subjective being.

Logic/community/intellect/mental: Logic is the processing of our interface with our objective constructs, our social being.

Reason and logic in turn both operate in the same double fashion:

Inductive: centrifugal from part/center to whole. The inductive source of reason is self, of logic is its axioms.

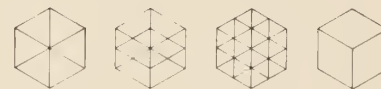
Deductive: centripetal from whole to part/center. The deductive source of reason is world-presence, of logic is its boundaries.

(That a scientist employs intellect is obvious; that he employs intuition is less obvious but equally true. Consider how often scientists will describe their solutions in aesthetic terms, as being “elegant” or “beautiful.” That an artist will employ both intellect and intuition is likewise true. At one level, the only difference between the scientist and the artist is one of method: the scientist tends to keep an ongoing formal record of his decisions, while for the artist, the art object exists as the inclusive record of his decisions. But in both cases, simply put, we witness a sequence of yes-no decisions

weighed in contest. Each yes-no, whether intellectual or intuitive, is derived through a counterpoint of induction and deduction.)

Reason and logic are each capable of infinite extension and sophistication conditioned only by our commitment to limit ourselves to the realms of their separate hegemonies. Their *use* is relative. As vantage points they represent the two principal frames of reference, i.e., the bases, root causes, or ultimate agents of our distinctions and decisions. The need, it seems, is self-evident. That we subjectively feel and think and objectively think and commune—and that we do so simultaneously—is observable at almost every moment. The intrinsic merit in *two modes of knowing* lies in the fact that they are perfectly complementary by their contradictions. Each contributes what the other concedes. The *why* we come to hold formal (objective) constructs is now clear, i.e., out of need. The *how* to this point is also clear, i.e., in the mode of working constructs. The next movement in our compounding abstraction (from formal to formalized) will naturally intensify the character of the why, while radically threatening the balance in the character of how. Our complementary contradiction will now become pure contradiction: Logic vs. Reason, culture vs. individual. As certain formal working constructs (logical, objective criteria and methodologies) persist into the culture, they seem to petrify into formalized facts of nature, transcendent laws. No longer supple tools for specific purposes, they now stake tyrannical claims to absolute knowledge. It is one thing to think that such a transcendence exists but quite another to think that any one of our terrestrially conceived constructs approximates that absolute. The fact of our lives and logics having up till now enjoyed a *relative* independence and self-sufficiency will now become compounded fact—the fact of facts—to form a truth, and while appearing to become more concrete, will in fact become increasingly ethereal and unsupported.

## 6. Formalism



With formalism, the final stage of our model, we arrive at the practice or doctrine of strict adherence to, or dependence on, prescribed or established forms. These forms now convince, prove, or obviate argument in a mode quite apart from, beyond, or opposed to reason as a means of arriving at a decision. Formalism (objective form reified into transcendent *truth*) now turns things around and comprehends and expresses the nature of things, what is essential, as the predicate of some formal determination of the schema; before we know it we find ourselves attending to the schema rather than to that which it is a schema of.

It should be noted here that I am attempting to describe the process as it is being played out in our time and as such seems to



be confronting the successes of formalist logic and scientific method. But the point is that throughout history, in one way or another, we have compounded our reality into a formalized version, forcing the ephemera of nature into predetermined frameworks. We need only consider the transcendent hierarchies in the metaphysics of antiquity, or the transcendent claims of medieval theology. Ours; in turn, is the age of logic, when it has become necessary to define and develop a philosophy, a logic of aesthetics (to explain objectively that which already exists otherwise) or a theology for the logical explanation of faith. Then, the preferred vantage point for conclusive mediation in this culture is from a source clearly external to the subjective being.

But what is meant by the assertion that a formalized proposition is "true"? Any definition for the idea "truth" seems elusive and hardly separates itself from fact: "conformity with fact," "agreement with reality," "true to life." Again, it seems almost explicit in our usage that this truth is not a separate entity but exists as a predicate to a real something, and as such is *conditional*. We misread this truth as belonging to the very nature of the object. We find ourselves believing that because a reliable measure exists, a simple fact/truth exists in line with the measure. But in fact our reliable measure often turns out to be *theoretical* (i.e., clock time, Euclidean space); just as often our measure turns out to be felt or emotional and simply rises above fact, becoming *ethereal*. In either case, it would seem the formalization of fact to truth is a *considered* (further compounded) product of the mind.

But is this how we really think or feel about our truths—as something simply aligned with fact, conditional theoretical or ethereal—or don't we actually come to hold our truths more deeply, as personal and real, not so much gained from evidence or procedure, but rather experienced as whole and originary?

How we come to hold our truths—this, then, is the point of the model, to approach the complexity of our ideas not as isolated questions, but as the compound of sets of facts, the fact of facts. Facts which have been abstracted in such discrete stages and over such extended periods of time that we come to them generations removed, at a point where they are simply given to us whole—ideas gained in this way are more closely aligned with *belief* and *faith*. And in this myth of our ideas as whole truth we often lose sight of the real complexity that is the *living process*, that deceptively simple fact of our presence in the world.

The hypothesis is simple: that all ideas and values have their roots in experience, that they are further compounded in both subjective and objective form, that they can be held separate (isolated) at any point and developed directly on the grounds of function and use, but that they in fact remain *relative* to the condition of both our subjective and objective being.

How does fact as "formalized truth" deal logically with contradiction? The answer is awkwardly, if at all. (And in this way we

have acquired the single most dangerous habit of civilization: change by crisis.) When the terrestrial boundaries/axioms of our facts petrify into something uncontestable, the further character of our inquiry, experience, experiment, argumentation, and criticism begin and end with their established formalism, the grounds of which, in time, from a simple lack of scrutiny, become those invisible "hidden orthodoxies." For example: The requirement of frame to painting, of object to sculpture, *of these things to art*.

(It is quite easy to argue for the obvious usefulness, added efficiency and stability—in short, the successes of formalism. I need only point to the incredible accomplishments of the physical sciences and technology. However, the question of its efficacy with regard to human and social concerns is not clear. While employment of the hypothesis of social formalism, with its implicit or explicit contraction of the analysis of all human and social processes to their objective, behavioral manifestations, can be very revealing, this behaviorism has a tendency to reduce substantial human relations to formal and abstract relations. There is, for example, the tendency in psychology and sociology to gain not the sense of procedures but an explanatory system treating categories of thought and analysis as if they were real substance. Human beings living in and through structures become structures living in and through human beings. It can be argued that this idea of truth as represented in scientific method and historical behaviorism has in many ways become the new belief, orthodoxy, faith; that the principal change in the modern social revolution has been a transference of our faith in a supreme transcendent being to a belief in a supreme transcendent logic, which is essentially only a change in style.)

It can now be noted that the characterization "antithesis" used earlier in describing the movements of modern art indeed fits the facts. Modern art can be effectively thought of as a process moving in the opposite direction from that which our model described. This fact is culturally visible in the degree of its social obscurity; modern art has become estranged from the prevailing culture because its ambitions are radically opposed to it. Modern art challenges the overreaching objectivity of behaviorist formalism by insisting on the independent validity of subjective perceptions. The difficulty in recognizing the implications of this posture, even for art, is that the challenge is not simply external but is indeed a questioning for the justifications of the definition of form in art itself, beginning with the issues in modern art's confrontation with those formalized assumptions and practices of a single transcendent art logic, resident in objective pictorial thought (e.g., figuration, perspective, etc.). Modern art can be traced to the opposite end of that pendulum: what is central to the present art dialogue is the reestablishment of the role of the individual as the source, subjectively defining what is art. Articulated at its most extreme, the antithesis proposed by modern art verges on a social spectrum of total chaos, with as many "arts" as there are individuals and moments in time. The actual state of affairs is somewhere in between, that while there

is in fact no one overriding (general) agreement as to what is meant by the word "art," there is instead a series of separate and distinct agreements existing simultaneously, some overlapping and some in seeming contradiction with one another, within which those participants have agreed to disagree by degrees.

As a community, can we live with such complexity? To what degree can we begin to deal with art forms which seem to lack even the formal, physical properties for assimilation by existing historical method, linguistic analysis, and objective measures for quality? What does the shape and character of our formal or institutional practice need to be in order to deal with the richness and chaos of such a humanism? Or must we again resolve all this diversity and contradiction to one "art"?

Without having to go into the real complexities of those growing individual distinctions, by way of approach and in line with our model, I think we can isolate four separate operative frames of reference, existing simultaneously, out of which art is being practiced and criticized today. It should be noted that none is more real than the others, therefore none is more true than the others:

1. "Art" is a posture of aesthetic inquiry, the perceptual/conceptual recognition, construction and ordering of individual reality. *Art as art.*
2. "Art" is a process of cultural innovation, the interdisciplinary articulation and argumentation by means of which new or novel ideas and forms achieve cultural validity. *The art of art.*
3. "Art" is a communicative interaction with social need, the fostering of those "meaningful" overlaps of form for social practice and function. *The art of social concern.*
4. "Art" is a compounded historical development. This historical process is the grounds for art as a sophisticated cultural discipline. *The art of civilization.*

While the model was not intended as a diagram of the process of social innovation, there are enough resonances for us to note that any discipline—physics, philosophy, art, etc.—is definable as a reciprocal system of development, capable of imploding toward the particulars of fact so as thereby to underwrite meaningful social practice, and equally capable of extending toward the recognition and inclusion of what it is that is not yet known. To be able to do the latter, each discipline must maintain a porous membrane at the edge of its body of knowledge.

Inquiry—innovation—practice—history—  
history—practice—innovation—inquiry.

Porous to what? What is the unique reason of the discipline art? Why art? What is the *source* of its becoming? And what is the essential *subject* of art? That the source of its becoming begins

unique to the individual and arises in the setting of intentions (i.e., what it is he actively seeks or needs to know or do) is in fact without question. The thesis of factual relativity states that one cannot simply go out in the world and neutrally collect facts without a prior perceptual/conceptual framework, a point of view from which to impose order upon reality. There is interesting and persuasive clinical data as to the overwhelming power of our intention as the principal source in the forming of our reality. The real question is: how and to what extent do we ever really participate directly in the setting of our intentions? Or do we more simply choose between those cultural options presented to us?

The extender/inquirer in any primary discipline—physics, philosophy, art, etc.—is the anomaly, in that while the movement of all the other intentions within that discipline is toward function and the collective whole, the movement of inquiry begins with the very question of intention as source (the unmediated wonder of the individual's ability to form a perceptual/conceptual reality), often suspending what is ordinarily accepted so as to summon the obscure questions of doubt and curiosity. Curiosity is a seemingly unique living force that often moves without established logic in directions away from or even contrary to logical courses of action. This doubt/curiosity is the porous membrane and is indeed the area of direct confrontation with the question of the generation of subsequent intentions. (Of course, the art of inquiry is unique to the intention/posture of the moment of inquiry. When the inquirer/artist exhibits the results of his activity, he has already crossed over and joined in the processes of innovation.)

This process of inquiry exists and operates at the precise edge of the body of knowledge that is the discipline/civilization and relates to the whole in what I would like to call the *dialogue of imminence*. The individual inquirer embodies an overlap of immediate presence and mediated civilization. The dialogue arises because certain connections or recognitions become potential in experience at certain moments in time and place; and it assumes the fact that if I can come to think something it is because it has become thinkable, and that if I can come to think it, it is not unreasonable to suppose someone else somewhere will be thinking it. Therefore the critical requirement for communication—community—is fulfilled *naturally* in the dialogue of imminence. All ideas of communication beyond this point are culturally compounded forms, communication-plus-intention, i.e., what it is we want or need to accomplish toward a collective goal.

The point is that the fundamental data base, the reality for every human endeavor, is experiential, shifting, dependent on non-objective factors, and thoroughly nonconcrete, so that any added distinctions, definitions or functions must account for the added character of its source, i.e., intention. Each abstracted assertion is only of value within the field of its properly intended deployment. The source of art is the intention art.

In seeking after the subject of art, we should first note that



inquiry of its own definition has become the central task of the activity known as "modern art." (And wherever ideas or values are the concern, the activity of definition can never be held external to the living process.) The name "art" originally applied to any acquired skill (the art of medicine, politics, cooking) and implied a distinct contrast between *making* and *nature*. In turn the word evolved to indicate the seven liberal arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy) or the seven muses (history, poetry, comedy, tragedy, music, dancing, and astronomy). There later developed an increasingly common specialization of meaning to a group of skills not formally represented (i.e., painting, drawing, sculpture, and engraving) with the subsequent separation of artist and artisan through an insistence on the primacy of the artist's imaginative and creative purposes (as opposed to the artisan's manual craft and industry). It was here that the artist began to assume his special and precarious status as the *subjective individual*. By the separation of "art" and "liberal," in the gradual specialization of the scientist, art began to generate its own internal purposes, with the added development of art as "fine," "high," and "noble." The word "art" then became more closely aligned to those of culture and *aesthetics*. Increasingly the emphasis fell upon the subjective dimensions of the artist's vocation, his "artistic" temperament and sensibilities. Coming full circle, *nature*, now in the person of the *artist*, had become an immediate part of the definition of "art/artist." The word "artiste" now split off to denote activity more implicated in performance (the actor, singer, or dancer) and the term "art" now came to connote a more meditative act, moving away from performance as the critical aspect of the definition, and thereby indicating a distinct and added division in the purposes of labor. In this sense modern art and the modern artist have intentionally become increasingly specialized, indicating a general intention not to be determined by immediate criteria of exchange or use. *Making* and *nature* now threaten to dissolve, the one into the other, in the being of the artist, thereby imminently aligning the purpose and meaning of art with that of *aesthetics*. The emphasis in the definition for art now takes a distinct turn from the practical to the theoretical.

While the early Greek emphasis for aesthetics was on the material as perceivable by the senses, the word evolved to English by way of the later stress in German philosophy on the added dimensions of the immaterial or what can only be felt as the direct result of experience. This now immaterial sense activity is intimately tied to the subjective individual, and this conception of the individual to the distinction of what is art. As the social void has grown, there have of course been numerous objective attempts to represent (capture) the nature of this aesthetics in a more logically accessible way ("the science of the beautiful," "the philosophy of taste," "the theory of fine arts"). Plus this aesthetics has been rendered the villain in the division of art and society. The argument of much social thinking has tried to cast aesthetics as representative of elitist activity, confusing the word "elitist" with simple obscurity. But we have

already accounted for this alienation as being neither incidental nor accidental (modern art has intentionally cast itself as antithesis) and noted that all new ideas, extensions of human potential and knowledge, begin socially obscure. Furthermore, we have discussed in detail through the model the actual relationships, responsibilities, and rules of correspondence for how our social structures are developed as a complementary whole.

In modern art the "marriage of figure and ground" was a symbolic questioning of the relationships of the two modes of knowing—subjective and objective—that make up the "eternal paradox." The problem of that duality was the central issue in the development of nonobjective art and was resolved by the Abstract Expressionist insistence that "a painting is a painting." The trajectory in this art dialogue that began with the flattening of the classical value structure resulting in the crucial flattening of the illusionary space within the world of the canvas still remains to be played out into the real world in the marriage of object and space/place. The central issue in art now is the oneness of the subject/object of art. Nonobjective now translates non-object.

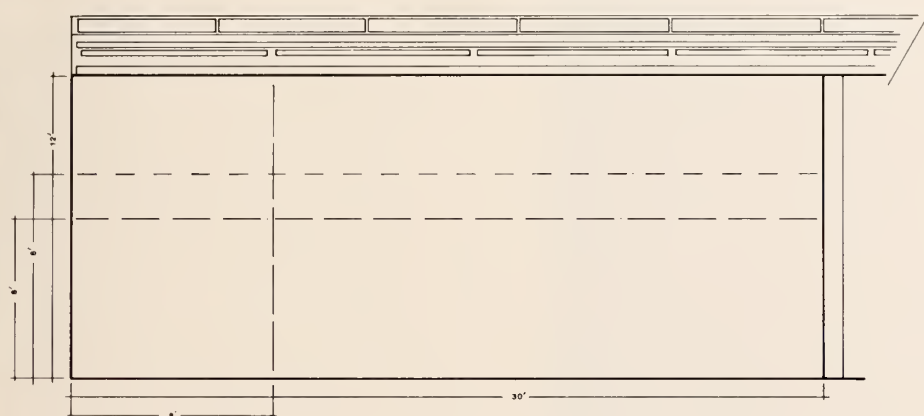
As art intermeshes with phenomenological aesthetics, it now confronts its root in the world. Aesthetics is an essence, a question the real extent of which we do not know but the nature of which is always present. This act (posture) of inquiry in any primary discipline—physics, philosophy, psychology, art—is the active extension of each discipline to consider in experience and reflection the nature of things in the world and specifically the nature of our being in it. *Being and circumstance*. (That which we can come to think about *is* substance or how else, why else would we be able to inclined to think about it? If we elect to acknowledge only that which we can cognitively or physically organize, then we limit our *active field of awareness* to be less than the subject.) As with modern art, disciplines as diverse as physics (quantum mechanics) and sociology (ethno-methodology) are now trying to account fully for the relativity of the observer/individual, the human element, represented in the unique perspective of the individual as the ultimate frame of reference.

Aesthetics is a particularly difficult concept: by implying so much, it would seem from any practical perspective to imply nothing. The word "aesthetics" begins and ends as an anomaly. The naming of aesthetics, not to mention the inquiry into its nature, is in itself a *logical* self-indulgence. At another level, however, aesthetics is the very science of *reason*.

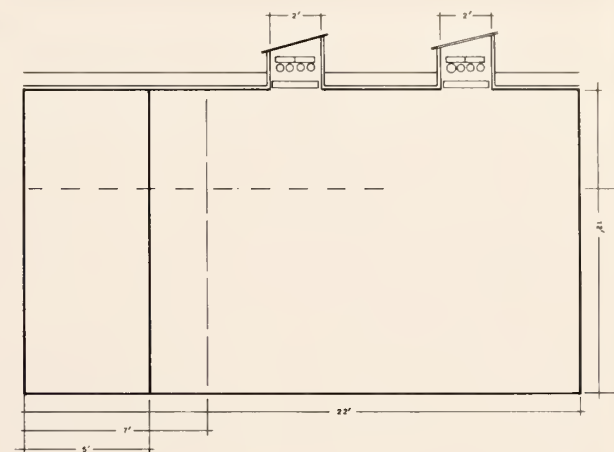
Art as an aesthetic inquiry is a non-thing. Which is to say that, like time and space, it has no actual physical properties. Or infinite physical properties. There are in aesthetic experience potentially as many "arts" as there are encounters with its incidences in the world. In confusing the art/object of "art" with the subject of art, we objectively tried to hold to the idea of one transcending art. While there is no one transcending "Art," there is one infinite subject: The subject of art is aesthetic perception.



Fractured light—Partial scrim ceiling—Eye level wire. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970.

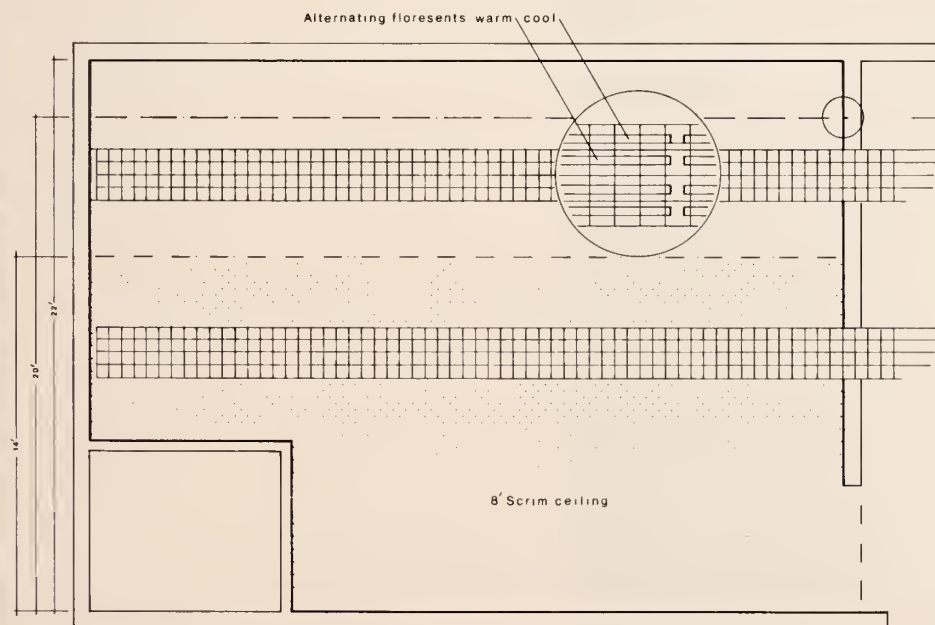


North Section

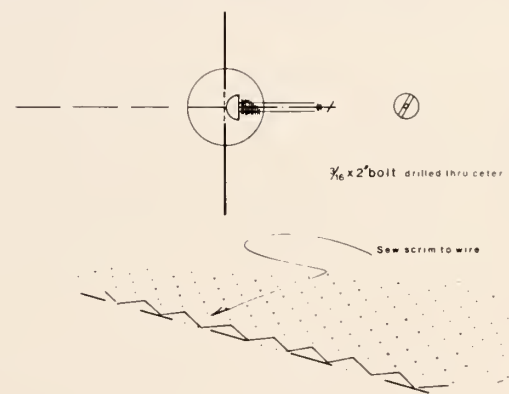


West Section

Room Plan-Third Floor



Detail Sections



# MUSEUM OF MODERN ART NEW YORK

Fractured light - partial scrim ceiling - eye level wire



Scrim volume, artist's studio, Venice, California, 1969.



Skylights—Column, artist's studio, Venice, California, 1970.





Column, Northridge Shopping Center, Northridge, California, 1970.



Slant light volume, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1971.



Room angle light volume, Ace Gallery, Los Angeles, 1972.



Eye level wall division, The Pace Gallery, New York, 1973

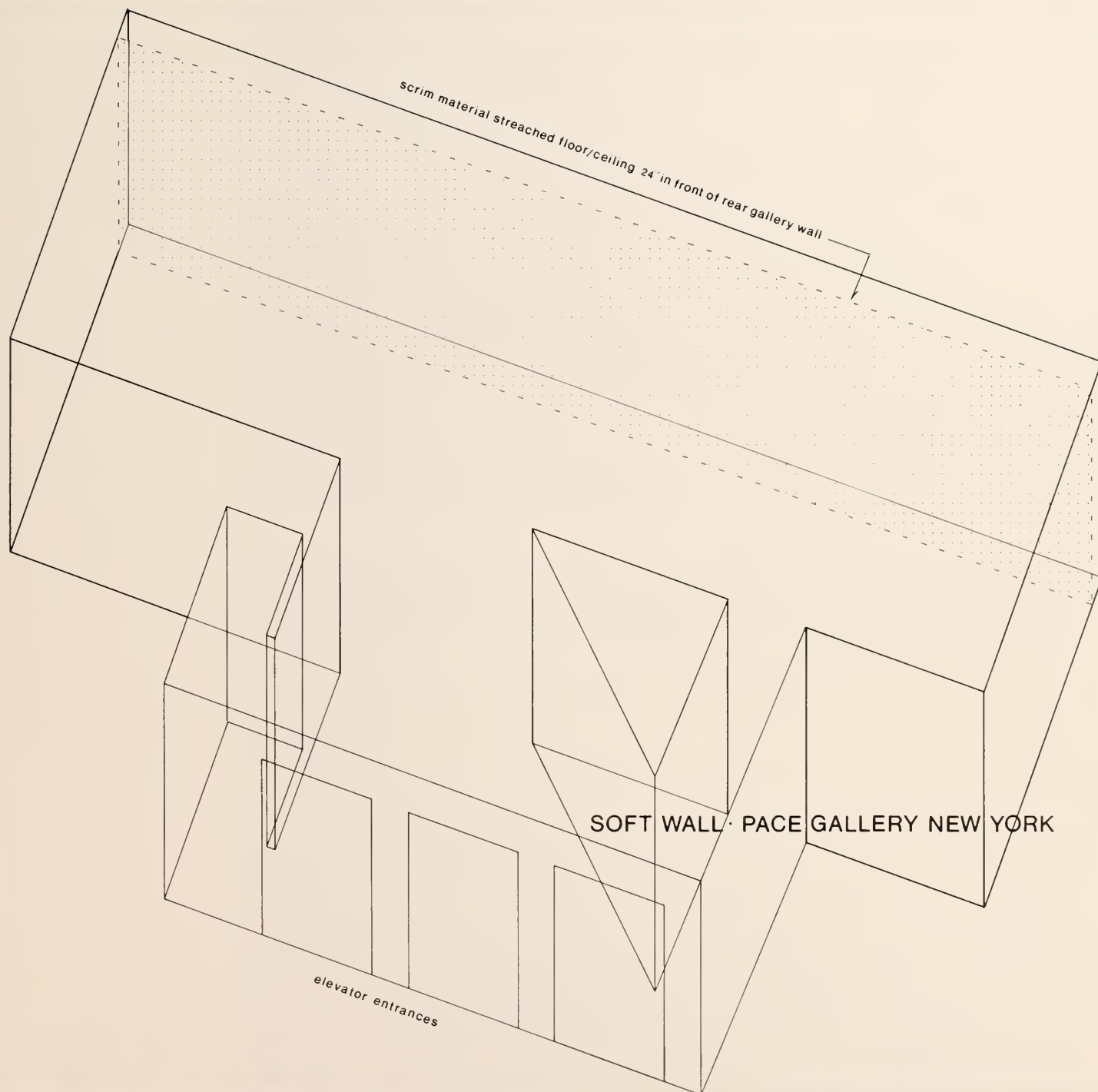


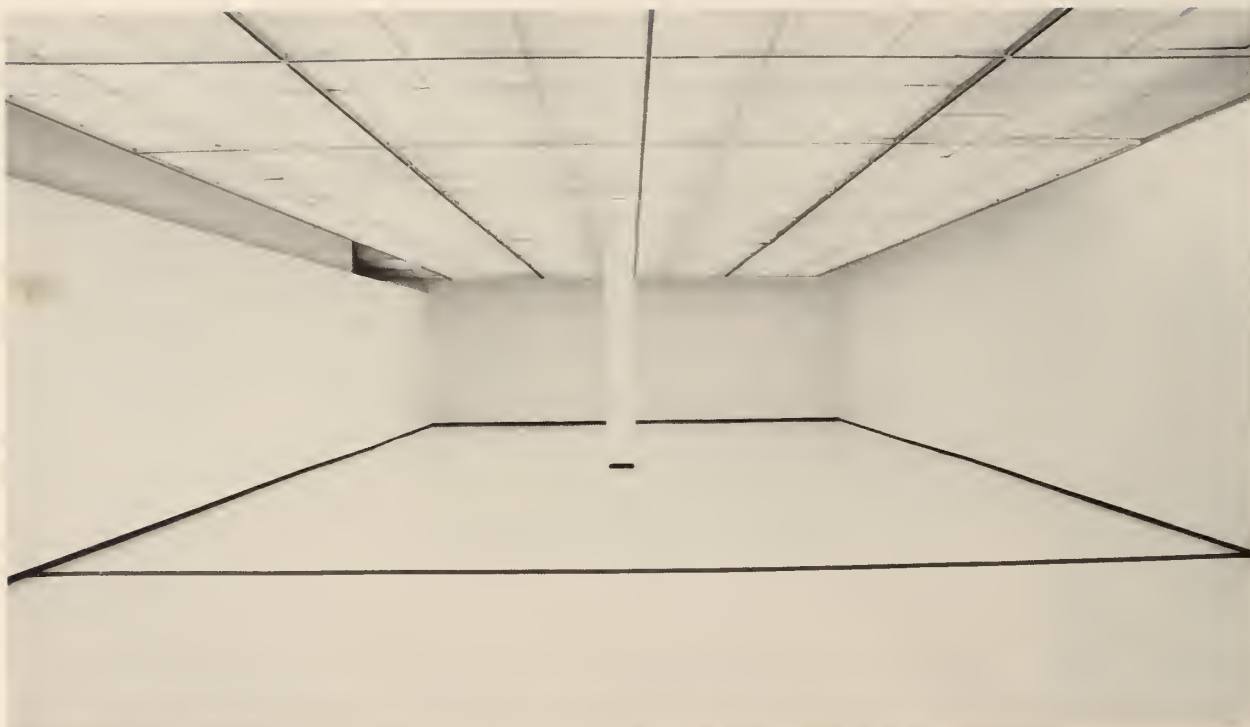
Wall division—Portal, Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, 1974



Wall plane, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, 1974







Black line volume. Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1975.



String volume. The Fort Worth Art Museum, 1975–76.

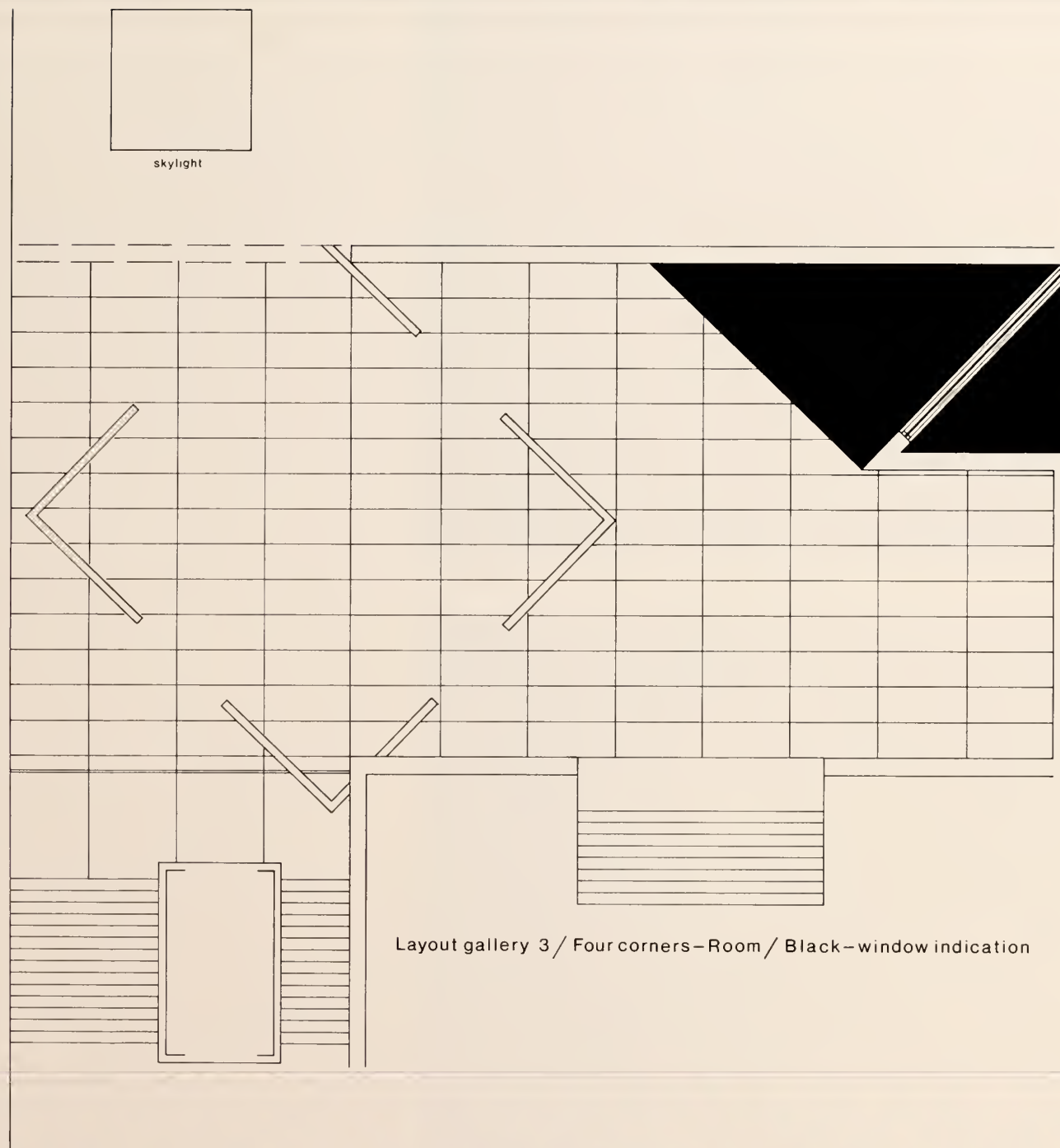


Scim veil, Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, 1975.

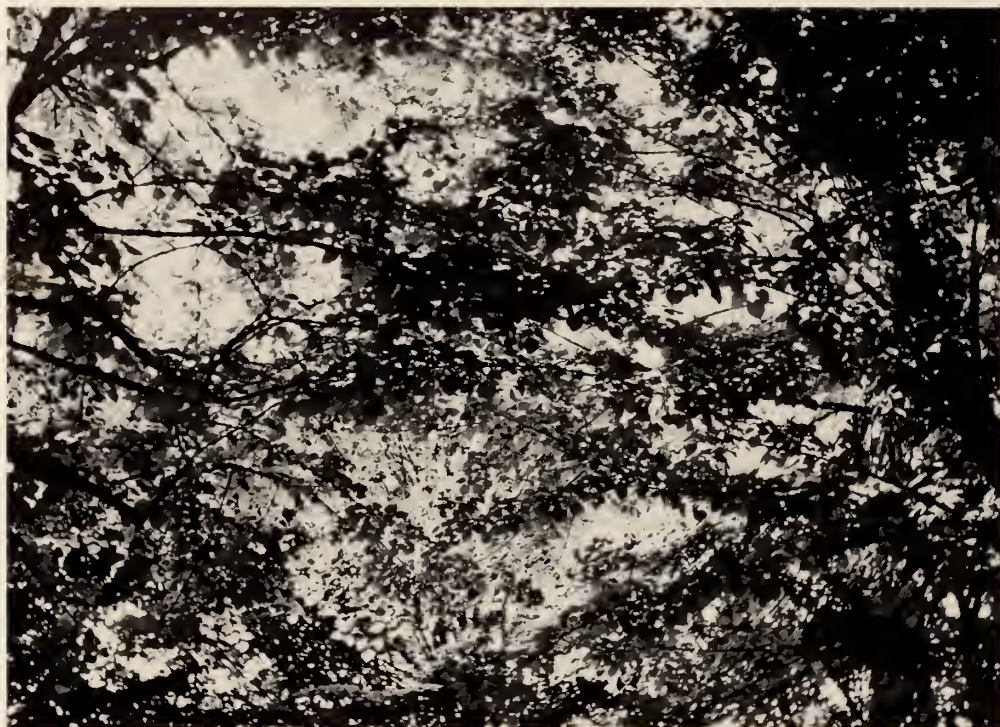




Four corners—Room, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1976.

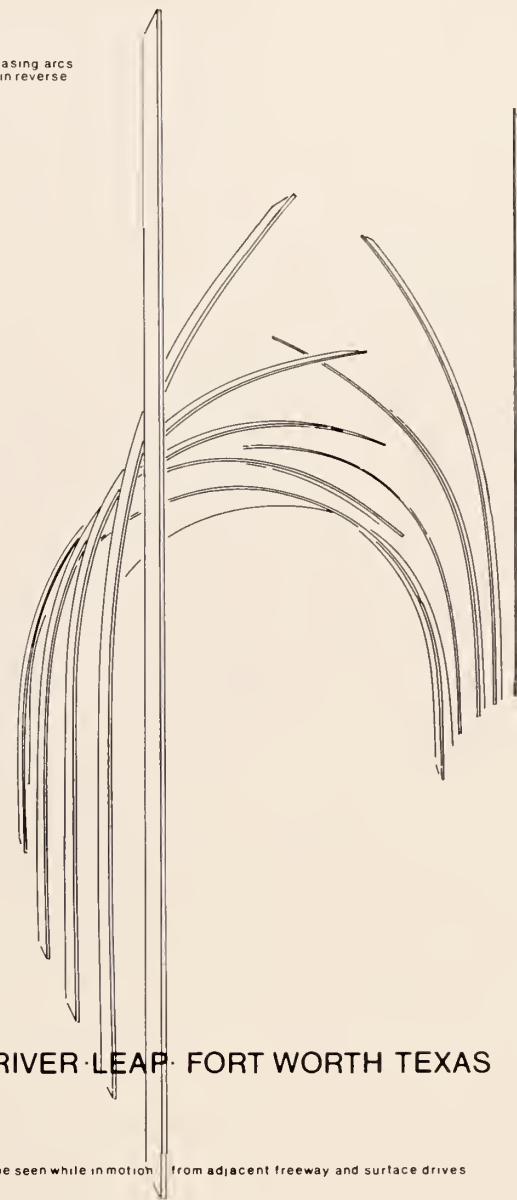
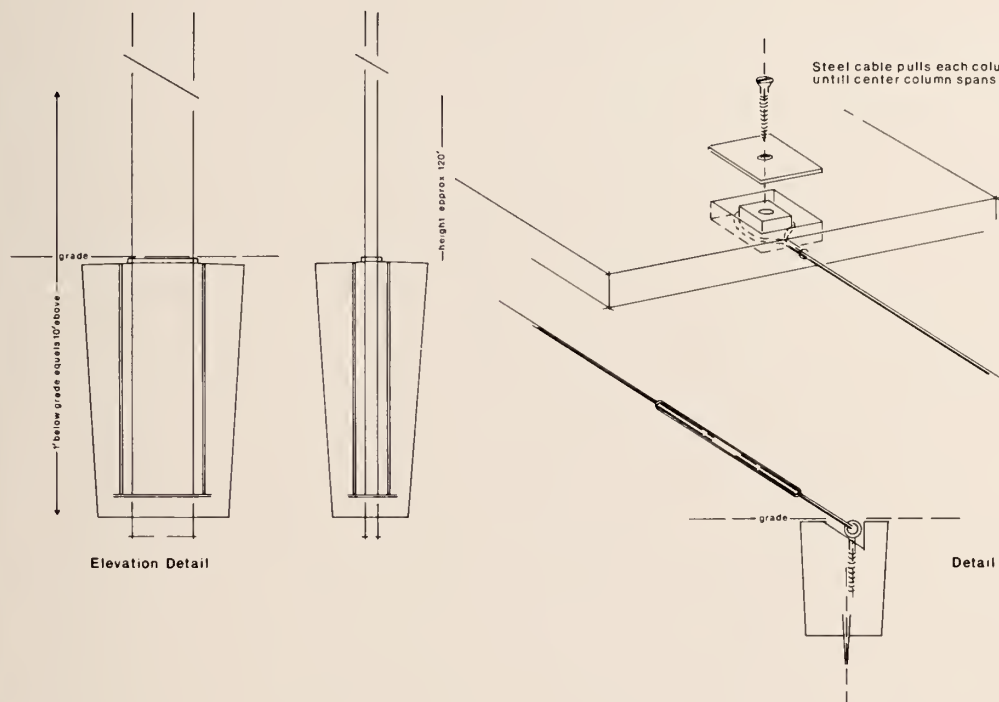


WALKER ART CENTER · MINNEAPOLIS



String drawing—Filtered light, 37th Venice Biennale, United States Pavilion, Venice, Italy. 1976.

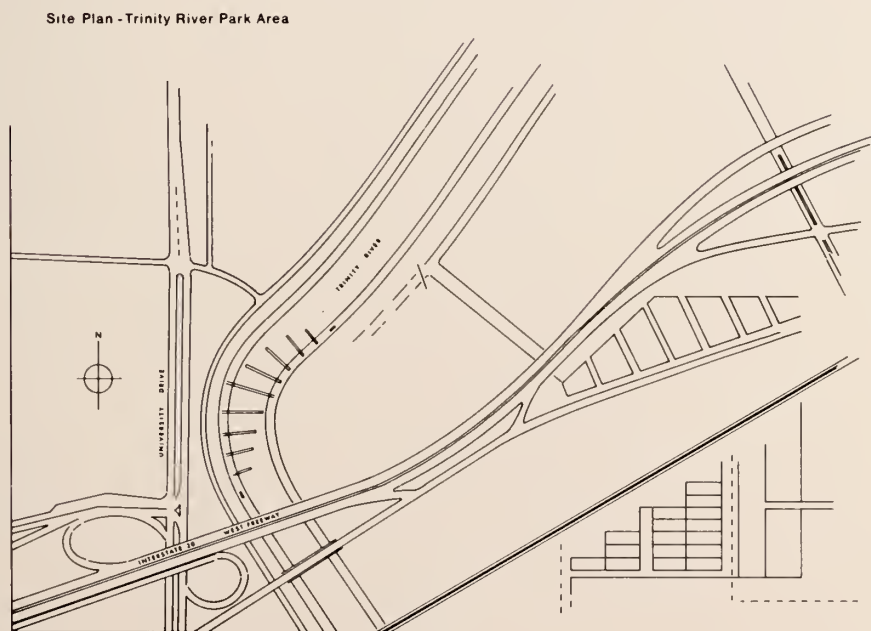




## TRINITY RIVER LEAP · FORT WORTH TEXAS

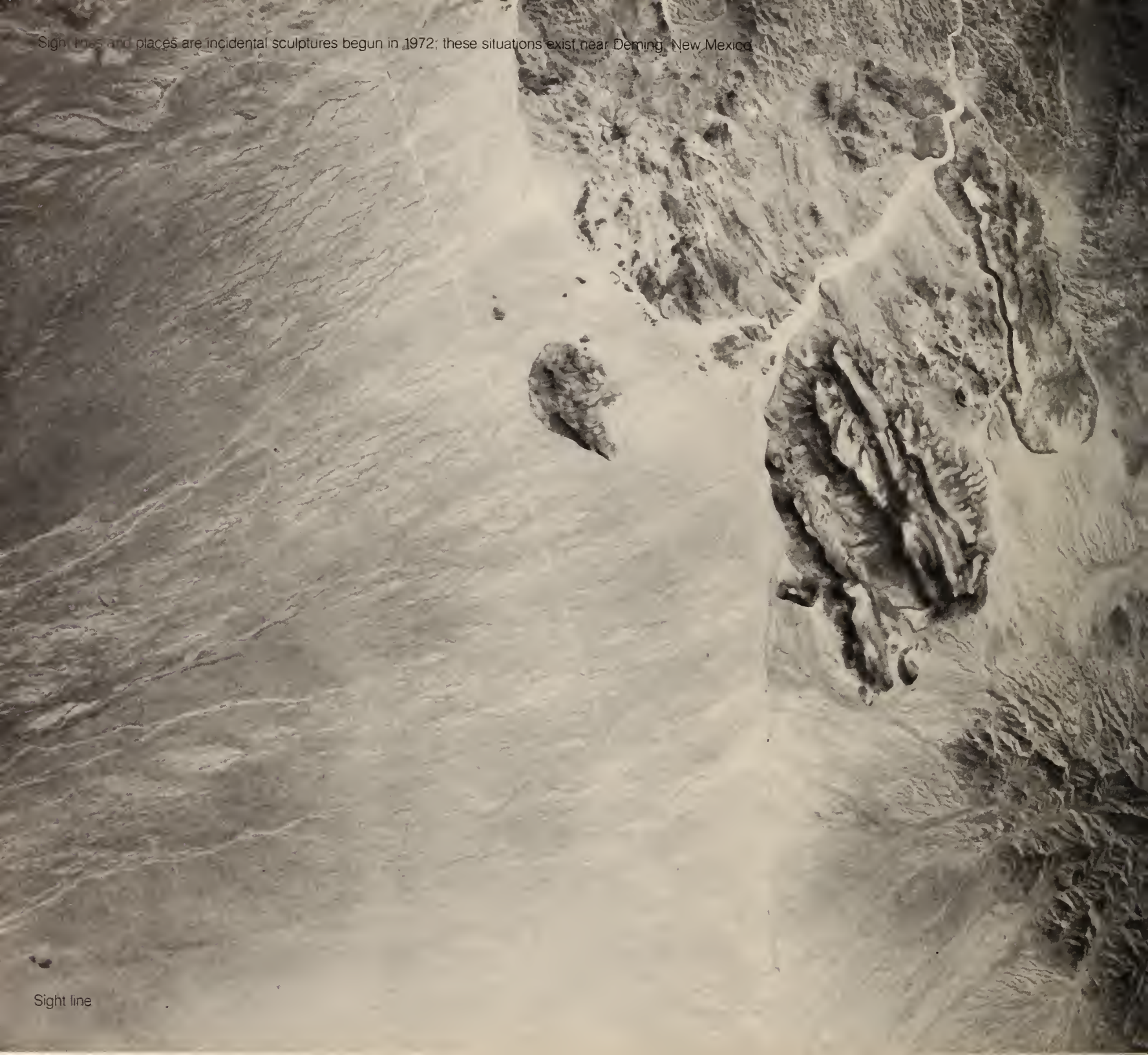
LEAP is located to be seen while in motion from adjacent freeway and surface drives

Elevation

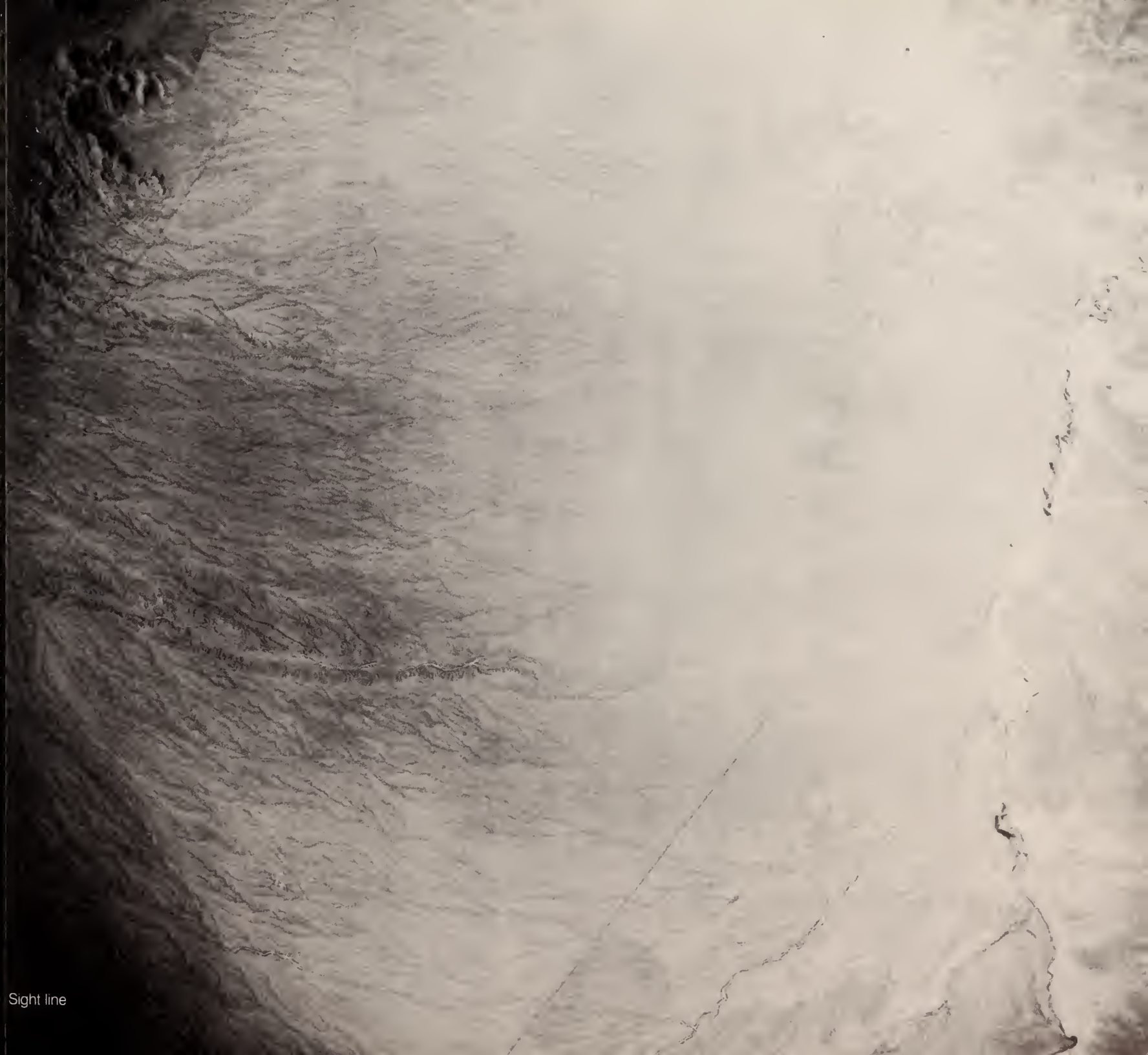


Sight lines and places are incidental sculptures begun in 1972; these situations exist near Deming, New Mexico

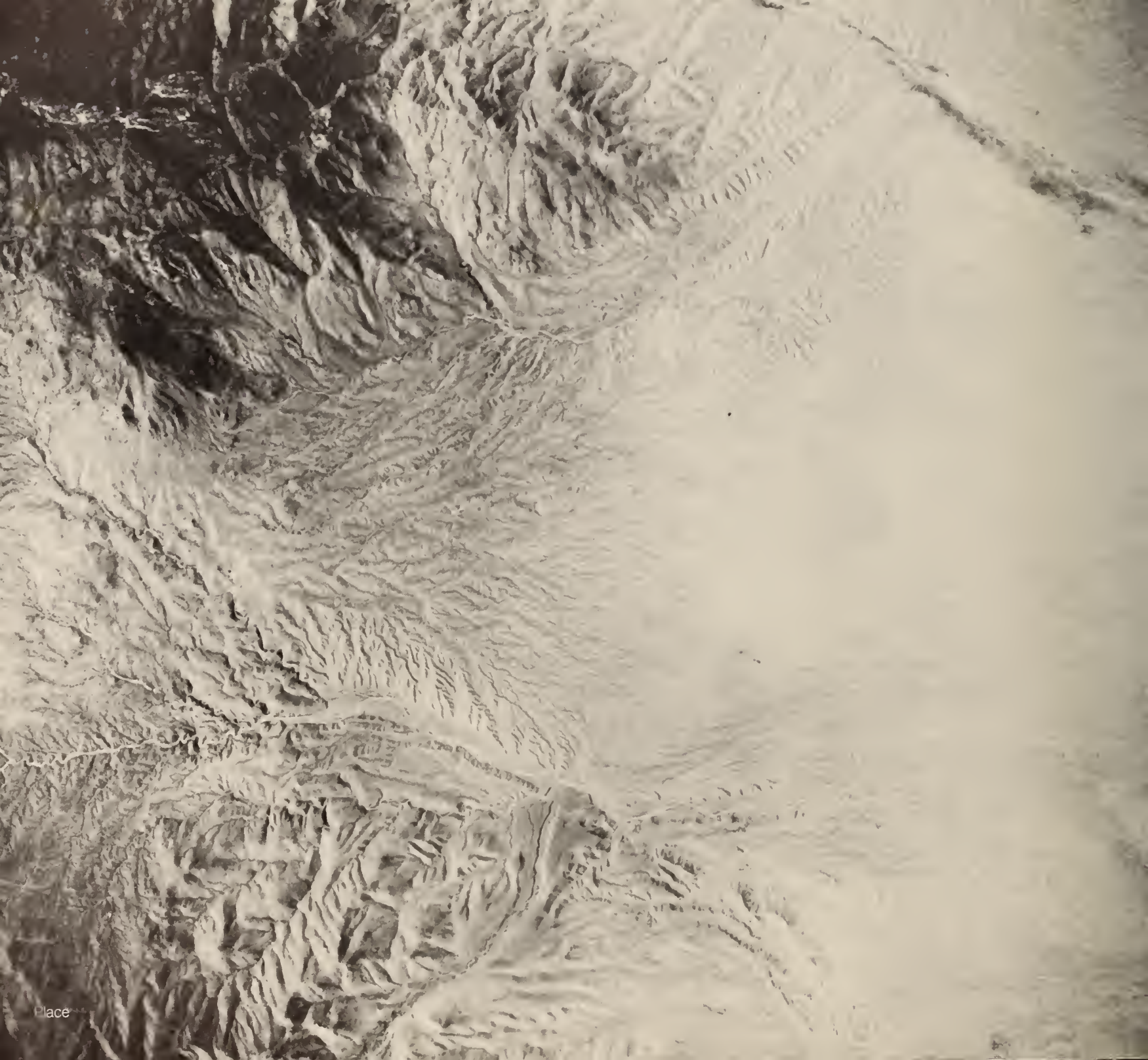
Sight line



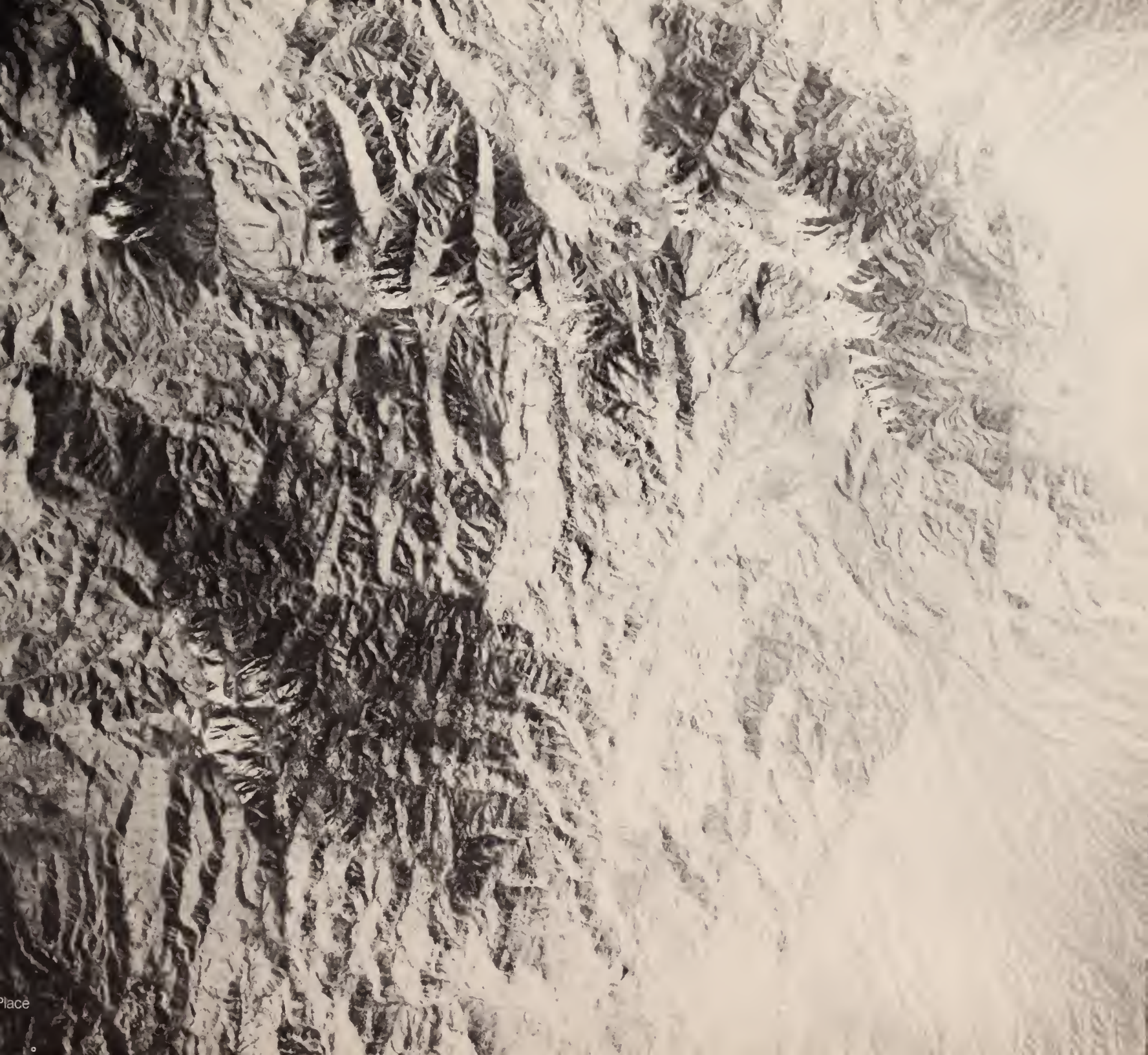












## Acknowledgments

The Whitney Museum of American Art is pleased to present the first major museum retrospective of the work of Robert Irwin. He is an extremely articulate artist concerned with the direct communication of his ideas, and we encouraged his collaboration in producing this catalogue. He accepted the challenge, and he considers his investigative and theoretical essay and the accompanying photographs and plans the culmination of a long period of creative effort and a documentation of his total work to date.

This exhibition presents a selection of paintings and sculpture from 1958 through 1971 representing the progressive phases of Irwin's early work, photographs and plans documenting his on-site installations for the period 1970 through 1976, and one of the artist's largest installation-response pieces, *Scrim veil—Black rectangle—Natural light*, designed specifically for the vast fourth floor gallery of the Whitney Museum. Cumulatively, these interrelated aspects of the exhibition are an ongoing project which illustrates the progression of Irwin's activities, concerns, and explorations. This progression culminates with *New York Projections*: aerial photographs of New York City, the installation piece in the Museum, and two on-site installations in the city with which Irwin illustrates the extension of his ideas out of the museum context and into the city environment. He designates actual and incidental phenomena in the city as having specific importance and interest, and as denoting man's imposition of geometry into nature. *New York Projections* and the catalogue essay, *Notes Toward a Model*, are intended to demonstrate and develop Irwin's argument that perception is the essential subject of art.

I would like to thank Tom Armstrong, Director of the Whitney Museum, for his continued enthusiasm and support of the exhibition project; Doris Palca, Head of Publications and Sales, who supervised production of the catalogue; and the members of the Museum staff who so successfully handled the innumerable details and complications of the installation.

The artist would like to extend his personal thanks to Marcia Tucker who initiated this project for the Museum; Lawrence Weschler for editing the essay; and Arnold Glimcher for his friendship.

As the catalogue is being prepared for publication, the outdoor installations are being planned, and I would like to thank for their cooperation and assistance the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and the City of New York Department of Highways.

Richard Marshall  
*Assistant Curator, Exhibitions*



## Checklist of the Exhibition

### **Ten Bulls, 1958**

Oil on canvas, 83 x 99 inches  
Collection of Michael J. Lannan

### **The Black Raku, 1958**

Oil on canvas, 61 x 84 inches  
Collection of Helen Jacobs

### **Pier Series II, 1961**

Oil on canvas, 65 x 65 inches  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Donn Chappellet

### **Crazy Otto, 1962**

Oil on canvas, 66 x 65 inches  
Collection of Arnold and Milly Glimcher

### **Untitled line painting, 1962**

Oil on canvas, 84 x 83 inches  
Private collection

### **Untitled dot painting, 1963–65**

Oil on canvas, 82½ x 84½ inches  
Private collection

### **Untitled line painting, 1964**

Oil on canvas, 84 x 84 inches  
Private collection

### **Untitled disc painting, 1966–67**

Acrylic paint on aluminum, 60 inches diameter  
Private collection

### **Untitled disc painting, 1969**

Acrylic paint on cast acrylic, 54 inches diameter  
Private collection

### **Column, 1971**

Cast acrylic, 108 inches high  
Courtesy of The Pace Gallery, New York

### **On-site works for the exhibition:**

#### **Scrim veil—Black rectangle—Natural light, 1977**

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
See plan, pages 3–7

#### **Black plane, 1977**

Intersection of Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York  
See plan, pages 9–11

#### **Line rectangle, 1977**

World Trade Center, New York  
See plan, pages 15–17

## Chronology

- 1928 Born September 12, in Long Beach, California
- 1946–47 Served in United States Army in Europe
- 1948–50 Studied at Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles
- 1950–51 Served in United States Army in California
- 1951 Studied at Jepsom Art Institute, Los Angeles
- 1952 Included in his first group exhibition, Los Angeles County Museum of Art
- 1952–54 Studied at Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles
- 1954–56 Lived in Europe and North Africa
- 1957 First one-artist exhibition, Felix Landau Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1957–58 Taught at Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles
- 1959 Traveled in Europe  
Painted series of hand-held objects
- 1961–62 Painted early line paintings
- 1962 Taught at University of California, Los Angeles
- 1962–63 Painted a series of late line paintings
- 1964–66 Painted a series of dot paintings
- 1966–67 Worked on a series of aluminum disc paintings
- 1968–69 Taught at University of California, Irvine  
Worked on a series of acrylic disc paintings  
Collaborated on Art and Technology project with Dr. Edward Wortz, perceptual psychologist, and the artist James Turrell  
Conducted the first N.A.S.A. International Habitability Symposium
- 1969–70 Worked on a series of cast acrylic columns
- 1970 Exhibited first scrim installation, The Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 1972 Began designating "sight lines" and "places" in the Southwest
- 1972–76 Project of general peripatetic availability: visited and spoke at approximately one hundred universities, museums, and art schools
- 1973–76 Project of permanent installation of works commissioned by Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, Varese, Italy, for his collection

## Selected Exhibitions

One-artist exhibitions precede group exhibitions; listings are chronological and include selected catalogues and reviews, and on-site installations.

1952 **Annual Exhibition—Artists of Los Angeles and Vicinity**  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, June 28–August 10

1953 **Annual Exhibition—Artists of Los Angeles and Vicinity**  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, May 8–June 21

1956 **Annual Exhibition—Artists of Los Angeles and Vicinity**  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, May 2–June 3

1957 **Robert Irwin**  
Felix Landau Gallery, Los Angeles

**Annual Exhibition—Artists of Los Angeles and Vicinity**  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, May 22–June 30

**1957 Annual Exhibition—Sculpture, Painting, Watercolors**  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, November 20–  
January 12, 1958

1958 **Annual Exhibition—Artists of Los Angeles and Vicinity**  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, May 21–June 29

1959 **Recent Paintings by Robert Irwin**  
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, March 23–April 18  
Catalogue: *Recent Paintings by Robert Irwin*  
Langsner, Jules. "Exhibition at Ferus Gallery." *Art News*, vol. 58  
(Summer 1959), p. 60.

**Altoon/Bengston/Defeo/Gechtoff/Irwin/Kauffman/Kienholz/  
Mason/Moses/Lobdell/Smith/Richer**  
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, July 20–August 15

**Annual Exhibition—Artists of Los Angeles and Vicinity**  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, August 4–September 6

1960 **Robert Irwin**  
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, April 18–May 14

**Robert Irwin**  
Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California, July 12–August 31

**Fifty Paintings by Thirty-Seven Artists of the Los Angeles Area**  
Art Galleries, University of California, Los Angeles, March 20–  
April 10  
Catalogue: *Fifty Paintings by Thirty-Seven Painters of the Los  
Angeles Area* Preface by Frederick S. Wight. Introduction by Henry  
T. Hopkins.

**Group Exhibition**  
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, June 20–July 16

**Annual Exhibition—Artists of Los Angeles and Vicinity**  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, August 17–September 25

1961 **Group Exhibition**  
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, April 3–29

1962 **Recent Works by Robert Irwin**  
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, May 8–26

**Pacific Profile of Young West Coast Painters**  
Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California, June 11–July 19  
Catalogue: *Pacific Profile of Young West Coast Painters*. Essay by  
Constance Perkins.

**Fifty California Artists**  
Whitney Museum of American Art, October 23–December 2  
Also shown at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Albright-Knox Art  
Gallery, Buffalo, and Des Moines Art Center, 1963  
Catalogue: *Fifty California Artists*. Whitney Museum of American  
Art, 1962.  
Bogat, Regina. "Fifty California Artists." *Artforum*, vol. 1 (January  
1963), pp. 23-26.

1963 **Altoon/Bell/Bengston/Defeo/Irwin/Kauffman/Lobdell/  
Mason/Moses/Price/Ruben/Ruscha**  
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, June–July

1964 **New Paintings by Robert Irwin**  
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, April 7–May 30

**Seven New Artists**  
Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, May 5–29  
Catalogue: *Seven New Artists*  
Ashton, Dore. "Seven New Artists." *Arts and Architecture*, vol. 81  
(June 1964), p. 9  
Tillim, Sidney. "Seven New Artists at Janis." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 38  
(Summer 1964), p. 82.

**Some New Art from Los Angeles**  
San Francisco Art Institute, May 5–24

1965 **The Responsive Eye**  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 23–April 25  
Also shown at City Art Museum of St. Louis, Seattle Art Museum,  
Pasadena Art Museum, and Baltimore Museum of Art, 1965  
Catalogue: *The Responsive Eye*. The Museum of Modern Art, 1965.  
Essay by William C. Seitz.

**VIII São Paulo Bienal**  
Sao Paulo, Brazil, September 4–November 28  
Also shown at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington,  
D.C., 1966  
Catalogue: *VIII São Paulo Bienal, United States of America, 1966*.  
Exhibition organized and catalogue prepared by the Pasadena  
Art Museum. Essay by Walter Hopps.  
Kozloff, Max. "VIII São Paulo Bienal [at the National Collection of  
Fine Arts]." *The Nation*, February 28, 1966, pp. 250-52.  
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of Fine Arts]." *Art International*, vol. 10 (Summer 1966), pp. 130-31.

**The Studs: Moses, Irwin, Price, Bengston**  
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, December

1966 **Robert Irwin**

The Pace Gallery, New York, November 12–December 10  
 Ives, Colta Feller. "In the Galleries." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 41 (December 1966), p. 72.  
 Kozloff, Max. "New York." *Artforum*, vol. 5 (January 1967), p. 56.  
 Waldman, Diane. "Exhibition at Pace Gallery." *Art News*, vol. 65 (January 1967), p. 14

**Robert Irwin/Kenneth Price**

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 7–September 4  
 Catalogue: *Robert Irwin/Kenneth Price*. Essay by Philip Leider

1968 **Robert Irwin**

Pasadena Art Museum, California, January 16–February 18  
 Catalogue: *Robert Irwin*. Essay by John Coplans.

**Robert Irwin**

The Pace Gallery, New York, March 15–April 11  
 Baker, Elizabeth. In "Reviews and Previews." *Art News*, vol. 67 (May 1968), pp. 15–16.  
 Simon, Rita. In "In the Galleries." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 42 (May 1968), p. 64.

**Gene Davis, Robert Irwin, Richard Smith**

The Jewish Museum, New York, March 20–May 12  
 Catalogue: *Gene Davis, Robert Irwin, Richard Smith*. Essay on Irwin by John Coplans.  
 Feldman, Anita. In "In the Museums." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 42 (May 1968), p. 54.  
 Wasserman, Emily. "Robert Irwin, Gene Davis, Richard Smith." *Artforum*, vol. 6 (May 1968), pp. 47–49.

**Los Angeles 6**

Vancouver Art Gallery, British Columbia, March 31–May 5  
 Catalogue: *Los Angeles 6*

**Faculty '68**

Art Gallery, University of California, Irvine, April 16–May 5  
 Catalogue: *Faculty '68*. Introduction by Clayton Garrison.

**6 Artists, 6 Exhibitions**

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, May 12–June 23  
 Also shown at Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, 1968

**Documenta 4**

Kassel, Germany, June 27–October 6

**Untitled, 1968**

San Francisco Museum of Art, November 9–December 29  
 Catalogue: *Untitled, 1968*. Introduction by Wesley Chamberlain.  
 Stiles, Knute. "Untitled '68: The San Francisco Annual Becomes an Invitational." *Artforum*, vol. 7 (January 1969), pp. 50–52.

**Late 50s at the Ferus**

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, November 21–December 15

1969 **Robert Irwin**

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, January

**Recent Work by Robert Irwin**

La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, California, August 28–September 28

**Robert Irwin**

The Pace Gallery, New York, October 4–29  
 Ashton, Dore. "New York Commentary." *Studio International*, vol. 178 (December 1969), p. 231.  
 Krauss, Rosalind. In "New York." *Artforum*, vol. 8 (December 1969), p. 70.  
 Ratcliff, Carter. "New York Letter." *Art International*, vol. 13 (Winter 1969), pp. 73–74

**Robert Irwin/Doug Wheeler**

Fort Worth Art Center, Fort Worth, Texas, March  
 Also shown at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1970  
 Catalogue: *Robert Irwin/Doug Wheeler*. Fort Worth Art Center, 1969.  
 Introduction by Jane Livingston.

**Kompas IV: West Coast U.S.A.**

Stedelijk Museum, Eindhoven, Netherlands, November 12–January 4, 1970  
 Catalogue: *Kompas IV: West Coast U.S.A.* Essay by Jean Leering

**West Coast 1945–1969**

Pasadena Art Museum, California, November 24–January 18, 1970  
 Also shown at City Art Museum of St. Louis; Art Gallery of Ontario, Ottawa; Fort Worth Art Center, 1970  
 Catalogue: *West Coast 1945–1969*. Pasadena Art Museum, 1969  
 Introduction by John Coplans.

1970 **Robert Irwin—Recent Work 1969–70**

Artist's studio, Venice, California, October 2–25  
 Work installed: Skylight—Column  
 Terbell, Melinda. "Los Angeles." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 45 (November 1970), p. 53.

**Robert Irwin**

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Oct. 24–Feb. 16, 1971  
 Work installed: Fractured light—Partial scrim ceiling—Eye level wire

**69th American Exhibition**

The Art Institute of Chicago, January 17–February 22  
 Catalogue: *69th American Exhibition*

**Bell/Irwin/Wheeler**

Tate Gallery, London, May 5–31  
 Catalogue: *Bell/Irwin/Wheeler*. Essay by Michael Compton.  
 Compton, Michael. "UK Commentary." *Studio International*, vol. 179 (June 1970), pp. 269–70.  
 Russel, David. "London." *Arts Magazine*, 44 (Summer 1970), p. 53



**Permutations: Light and Color**

Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, May 17–June 28

Catalogue: *Permutations: Light and Color*

**Looking West 1970**

Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, October 18–November 29

Catalogue: *Looking West 1970*

**A Decade of California Color**

The Pace Gallery, New York, November 7–December 2

Catalogue: *A Decade of California Color*

**1971 Robert Irwin**

The Pace Gallery, New York (installed at Donald Judd's studio, 101 Spring Street, New York), April 24–May 29

Siegel, Jeanne. In "Reviews and Previews." *Art News*, vol. 70 (Summer 1971), p. 14.

**Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space: Four Artists**

Art Galleries, University of California, Los Angeles, January 11–February 14

Work installed: Stairwell—Reflected light

Catalogue: *Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space: Four Artists*. Interview with Irwin by Frederick S. Wight.

**32nd Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting**

Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., February 28–April 4

Work installed: Scrim ceiling—Acoustic point—Ambient light

Catalogue: *32nd Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*

Drath, Viola. "32nd Corcoran Biennial: Arts as Visual Event." *Art International*, vol. 15 (May 1971), p. 41.

**Art and Technology**

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, May 10–August 29

Catalogue: *Art and Technology*. Essay on Irwin by Jane Livingston.

**Works for New Spaces**

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, May 18–July 25

Work installed: Slant light volume

Catalogue: *Works for New Spaces*

**11 Los Angeles Artists**

Hayward Gallery, London, September 30–November 7

Work installed: Transparent floor (withdrawn)

Also shown at Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (Plastic floor planes), and Akademie der Künste, Berlin (Scrim planes), 1972

Catalogue: *11 Los Angeles Artists*. Hayward Gallery, 1971. Essay by Maurice Tuchman and Jane Livingston.

**New Works from the Walker Art Center**

Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, November 12–December 9

Work installed: Skylight V volume

**1972 Robert Irwin**

Ace Gallery, Los Angeles

Work installed: Room angle light volume

**Robert Irwin**

Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 7–16

Work installed: Skylight ambient V volume

**Robert Irwin**

Galerie Sonnabend, Paris

Work installed: Split room slant scrim

**Robert Irwin**

Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, November

Work installed: Skylight volume column

**USA West Coast**

Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany, January 15–February 27

Also shown in Germany at Kunstverein, Hannover; Kolnischer Kunstverein; and Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, 1972

Catalogue: *USA West Coast*. Kunstverein, Hamburg, 1972

**The State of California Painting**

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand, May 23–June 15

Also shown in New Zealand in 1972 at Waikato Museum, Hamilton; City of Auckland Art Gallery; and in 1973 at National Art Gallery, Wellington; Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch; Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Catalogue: *The State of California Painting*. Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1972. Essay by Michael Walls.

**1973 Robert Irwin**

The Pace Gallery, New York, December 1–28

Work installed: Eye level wall division

Matos, José. In "Reviews." *Artforum*, vol. 12 (February 1974), p. 78.

Stitelman, Paul. "Robert Irwin." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 48 (February 1974), p. 65.

**Works in Spaces**

San Francisco Museum of Art, February 9–April 8

Work installed: Retinal replay volume

**Art in Space: Some Turning Points**

The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan, May 16–June 24

**American Art: Third Quarter Century**

Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington, August 22–October 14

Catalogue: *American Art: Third Quarter Century*

**1974 Robert Irwin**

Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, January 29–February 23

Work installed: Wall division—Portal

Terbell, Melinda. "African Art in Motion." *Art News*, vol. 73 (March 1974), p. 76

Plagens, Peter. In "Reviews." *Artforum*, vol. 12 (April 1974), p. 83.

**Robert Irwin**

University Art Galleries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, October 10–November 10

Work installed: Two story—Flat floating plane

**Robert Irwin—Installation**

Art Galleries, University of California, Santa Barbara, Dec. 3–15

Work installed: Two room wall—Wall scrim

**Robert Irwin**

The Pace Gallery, New York, December 7–January 4, 1975

Work installed: Soft wall

Dreiss, Joseph. In "Arts Reviews." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 49 (February 1975), p. 16

Rosing, Larry. "Robert Irwin at Pace." *Art in America*, vol. 68 (March 1975), p. 87.

**Illumination and Reflection**

Downtown Branch, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, April 10–May 16

Catalogue: *Illumination and Reflection*

**Art Now 74**

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C., May 30–June 16

Work installed: Light—Corner

Catalogue: *Art Now 74*

**Some Recent American Art**

Organized by the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Shown in Australia at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (Wall plane); Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (Elongated shaft light V volume); Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; West Australian Art Gallery, Perth; and in New Zealand at the City of Auckland Art Gallery (Slant—Light volume), 1974

Catalogue: *Some Recent American Art*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1974.

**1975 Robert Irwin: Continuing Responses**

The Fort Worth Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, July 27 continuing through 1977

Works installed: Stairwell soft wall; Atrium scrim veil; String volume; String drawing; Four corner—Lobby; Window—Window; Black rectangle; 12 city designations of "incidental sculptures"

**Robert Irwin**

Boehm Gallery, Palomar College, San Marcos, California, Oct. 16–28

Work installed: Eye level room division

**Robert Irwin**

Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, October 21–November 15

Work installed: Scrim veil

Wortz, Melinda. "Self-scrutiny and Scrims." *Art News*, vol. 75 (Jan. 1976), pp. 65–66.

Marmer, Nancy. In "Reviews." *Artforum*, 14 (Feb. 1976), pp. 69–70

**Robert Irwin**

Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, November 8–January 4, 1976

Works installed: Scrim V; Black line volume

Catalogue: *Robert Irwin*. Essay by Ira Licht.

Morrison, C.L. "Chicago." *Artforum*, vol. 14 (February 1976), p. 67.

**A View Through**

Art Galleries, California State University, Long Beach, September 22–October 19

Work installed: Passage window—Outdoors

Catalogue: *A View Through*

**University of California, Irvine: 1965–75**

La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, California, November 7–December 14

Work installed: Soft light volume

Catalogue: *University of California, Irvine: 1965–75*

**1976 Robert Irwin**

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, February 28–April 4

Works installed: Four corners room—Room; Window indication; Repeat slant light volume

**Robert Irwin**

Art Gallery, University of Maryland, College Park, September–October 29

Works installed: Gallery—Volume rectangle; Lawn—Open rectangle; Hillside—Straight line; Quad indication—Crossing paths

**The Last Time I Saw Ferus: 1957–66**

Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California, March 7–April 17

Catalogue: *The Last Time I Saw Ferus: 1957–66*

**200 Years of American Sculpture**

Whitney Museum of American Art, March 16–September 26

Work installed: Exhibition view—Double window plane

Catalogue: *200 Years of American Sculpture*. Essays on sculpture since 1950 by Barbara Haskell and Marcia Tucker.

**Critical Perspectives in American Art**

Fine Arts Center Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, April 10–May 9

Work installed: Stairwell slant volume

Catalogue: *Critical Perspectives in American Art*. Essays by Sam Hunter, Rosalind Krauss, Marcia Tucker.

**Projects for PCA**

Philadelphia College of Art, April 19–May 21

Work installed: Straighten gallery wall—Scrim plane

Catalogue: *Projects for PCA*. Essay by Janet Kardon. Symposium conducted by Marcia Tucker.

**Three Decades of American Art Selected by the Whitney Museum**

The Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo, June 18–July 20

### 37th Venice Biennale

Venice, Italy, July 18–October 10

Works installed: United States Pavilion, String drawing—Filtered light; Italian Pavilion, Room—Sight line—Window

### Painting and Sculpture in California: The Modern Era

San Francisco Museum of Art, September 3–November 21

Also shown at the National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C., May 20–September 11, 1977

### American Artists: A New Decade

The Fort Worth Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, November 14–January 2, 1977

Work installed: String volume

## Selected Bibliography

References are arranged chronologically. Exhibition catalogues and reviews are listed in Selected Exhibitions.

### Statements by the Artist and Interviews

Irwin, Robert. *Artforum*, vol. 3 (June 1965), p. 23. (Statement of his position on the photographic reproduction of his art.)

Irwin, Robert. *Artforum*, vol. 6 (February 1968), p. 4 (Letter to the editor.)  
*Transparency. Reflections. Light. Space: Four Artists*. University of California, Los Angeles, Art Galleries, 1971. Interview with Frederick S. Wight.  
 Mackintosh, Alistair. "Robert Irwin: An Interview with Alistair Mackintosh." *Art and Artists*, vol. 6 (March 1972), pp. 24–27.

Butterfield, Jan. "Part I. The State of the Real: Robert Irwin Discusses the Art of an Extended Consciousness." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 46 (June 1972), pp. 47–49. "Part II. Reshaping the Shape of Things." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 46 (September–October 1972), pp. 30–32. (Interview with Robert Irwin.)  
*Projects for PCA*. Philadelphia College of Art, 1976. Symposium conducted by Marcia Tucker.

### Books and Periodicals

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Coplands, John. "Circle of Styles on the West Coast." *Art in America*, vol. 52 (June 1964), pp. 24–41.

Coplands, John, Leider, Philip, Hopkins, Henry T. "A Portfolio of Contemporary Los Angeles Art. Formal Art, The Cool School, Abstract Expressionism." *Artforum*, vol. 2 (Summer 1964), pp. 42–46, 47–52, 59–63.

Coplands, John. "Los Angeles: The Scene." *Art News*, vol. 64 (March 1965), pp. 29, 56–58.

Coplands, John. "The New Abstraction on the West Coast U.S.A." *Studio International*, vol. 169 (May 1965), pp. 192–199.

Rose, Barbara. "Los Angeles: The Second City." *Art in America*, vol. 54 (January–February 1966), pp. 110–15.

Robins, Corrine. "The Circle in Orbit." *Art in America*, vol. 56 (November–December 1968), p. 65.

Plagens, Peter. "Robert Irwin, the Artist's Premises." *Artforum*, vol. 9 (December 1970), pp. 88–89.

Baker, Elizabeth. "Los Angeles, 1971." *Art News*, vol. 70 (September 1971), pp. 30–31.

Hunter, Sam. *American Art of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Abrams, 1973.

Butterfield, Jan. "An Uncompromising Other Way." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 48, (June 1974), p. 52–55.

Plagens, Peter. *Sunshine Muse: Contemporary Art on the West Coast*. New York: Praeger, 1974.

Rose, Barbara. *American Art Since 1900*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975.

Levine, Edward. "Robert Irwin: World Without Frame." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 50 (February 1976), pp. 72–77.

Butterfield, Jan. "Robert Irwin: On the Periphery of Knowing." *Arts Magazine*, vol. 50 (February 1976), pp. 72–77.

Smith, Roberta. "Robert Irwin: The Subject is Sight." *Art in America*, vol. 64 (March 1976), pp. 68–73.

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